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# ORACLES OF GOD

STUDIES IN THE  
MINOR PROPHETS

## ORACLES OF GOD

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# ORACLES OF GOD

## STUDIES IN THE MINOR PROPHETS

BY

W. E. ORCHARD, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "SERMONS ON GOD, CHRIST  
AND MAN," "ADVENT SERMONS," ETC., ETC.

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ORACLES OF GOD

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MINOR PROPHETS

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OF  
THE PROPHETS





## PREFACE

THE purpose of the present series precludes this book from being a detailed commentary on the Minor Prophets, and indeed such can be found plentifully provided elsewhere; but it is an endeavour to appreciate the personalities of the prophets and to estimate their contribution to religious, ethical and social thought. It has been sought to bring out especially the light their message throws upon present-day problems. Where so much good work has already been done on this subject it is difficult to say anything new, but an endeavour has been made in the present volume to discover what the message of the Minor Prophets means when taken as a whole, the one being allowed to correct the other, and thus a broader interpretation of God's word to them being gained. It is a temptation to be so impressed by the force and writing of the earlier prophets as to depreciate the more confused

## Preface

utterance, prosaic outlook and lower concern of some of the later prophets ; they certainly belong to the "Silver Age" of prophetic literature, but it is believed, and in this volume pleaded, that their message is of distinctive value and serves to correct a certain almost inhuman loftiness and negative programme which necessarily occurs in the earlier writers, whose message was of doom and whose programme was iconoclastic. But, taken together, and their varying notes woven into harmony, there is conveyed a sense of the wholeness of the revelation made to them even though it had to be ministered "at sundry times and in divers manners."

W. E. ORCHARD.

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*S. Columba*, 1922.

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## CHAPTER I

### Amos

ALTHOUGH the Book of Amos is the seventh in the order in which the Prophets are arranged in our Bible, and third in the little collection commonly designated the Minor Prophets, it is almost certain that his work represents the earliest attempt to commit prophetic utterances to writing by the person who himself delivered them. Amos is the earliest of the literary prophets. That in itself is an important and significant fact which has much underlying it. It is a new departure for a prophet. What led him to write down his message? It has been suggested that writing was, at any rate for people in his station, a recently acquired accomplishment. But we know so little for certain about the culture of those days that it is hardly safe to rest content with this as the sufficient explanation of why this prophet took to the pen. For here we have a herdman and a dresser of sycamores; although

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probably the owner of his small flock of sheep and perhaps of his own farm, for he was able to leave his work and travel northward under the impulse of the word which had come to him ; almost certainly only a peasant holder, and yet able to write. It would perhaps be possible to find men following the same calling in our own country to-day who could not write, though probably because they had forgotten their early schooling, but it certainly would be difficult to find many men in a similar position who could write so well, and who had such a wide acquaintance with the geography of their own land, the history of their own people and the movements of the outside world. For a man like this to be able to write, and to write like this, shows us that, however recent, culture had already reached a remarkably high stage.

It is not the novelty of the acquirement that entirely explains this new venture. We learn from his own hand that his message was rejected, that he was dismissed by the court and chapel officials at Bethel where he had gone to deliver his message, and although there is no indication that he was suppressed in any way, yet he was conscious that he had not been listened to, and

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he was confident that he had something to say which needed to be considered by the whole nation ; for he was convinced that what he had said was given to him by God and would certainly come to pass. Perhaps, too, he was aware that what he had to say would be needed in the future ; his vision was of things that are eternally true ; if it was to be rejected by his own generation then he must appeal to posterity. It may be that he felt his message was in some sense new, even though he appeals to the past for confirmation, and, therefore, ought to have a wider audience ; that it would only be understood when history had unrolled itself further and God's revelation was more willingly received. But everything indicates that we are standing at the beginning of a new movement, that we are witnessing the birth of new ideas ; and to understand that movement and the part that Amos played in launching it, we must go back a little so that we can the better measure its value.

It must be understood that since the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan the religion that had been taught them in the desert—to which we must at least ascribe a belief in the sovereignty of Jehovah and a covenant to worship Him alone,

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and which was understood to involve the observance of the elements of social justice—had suffered a certain deterioration and confusion through contact with the religion of the Canaanites. The latter appears to have been purely naturalistic, little more than the worship of the local personifications of natural forces, who were called Baalim, that is the lords and possessors of the land. Since it was believed that Jehovah Himself had conquered the land, He could be regarded as the true Baal of Canaan, but the use of the same name for Jehovah and the local gods wrought confusion in the common understanding. It was not only, as is so often the case, that under more settled conditions and the temptations of prosperity genuine religion had suffered a decline and social injustices had begun to appear, but the licentious rites and the religious ceremonies of the native inhabitants had been adopted, apparently with some idea that these would be acceptable to Jehovah-Baal, or to the local Baalim with whom the more superstitious might think it well to keep in favour. Here was a religious confusion crying out for a clear message.

But Amos had had predecessors who were called prophets, and yet he expressly distinguishes

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himself from them as being neither a prophet nor one of the sons of the prophets. This needs some explanation. If we go far enough back we shall find that prophet and priest were once combined in a single office, the priest being the official who superintended the sacrifices and also gave the oracles which could be derived from them. Such seers, as they were called, were consulted not only by the common people, but also by the rulers of the people, and we often find a seer attached to the court. Some of these may have been flatterers and deceivers, but some amongst them were no doubt men of greater vision, like Samuel the famous prophet; and as these seers became more notable or took any lead in national affairs, they came to be called prophets. But meantime another movement had been growing up which we read of under the description of "the sons of the prophets." These seem to have been originally bands of men who lived together in a sort of religious community. They were jealous for the worship of Jehovah and also intense nationalists; they were all for preserving the earlier simplicities connected with desert life; but they were fanatical and perhaps had little discernment of the ethical implications



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of the religion they were determined to maintain. This has been a constant phenomenon in all religions ; and yet out of their ranks there often emerges some lofty figure. So it had been in Israel, and in Elijah we have a mighty example. We do not know much of Elijah's religious ideas ; it looks as if he had little belief in the existence of Baal, and he was certainly very jealous for Jehovah ; but it must be remembered that the Baal whom he taunts was not a local deity, but the Tyrian Baal, who had no local jurisdiction, but whose worship Ahab had introduced in order to please his foreign wife. Certainly Elijah had a clear idea that the worship of Jehovah did not allow such things as the sequestration of Naboth's vineyard ; and, if we are not reading modern ideas into the story of Horeb, Elijah may there have learned that there was something wrong with his slaughter of the priests of Baal ; that God is found more in the silence than in the fire and storm. But it seems clear that up to the time of Amos there was no widespread recognition of the difference between religion and nationalism, and, therefore, no vivid consciousness that Jehovah was perfectly impartial in His judgments, which were based solely on

## Amos

ethical considerations. At any rate, the actual conditions in Israel, if Amos is any guide, were of a deplorable character. We know from other sources that golden calves had been set up at Bethel, which, although they were regarded as symbols of Jehovah, were apparently worshipped with the self-same rites, including sacred prostitution, with which the Canaanite Baalim had been worshipped. In addition, there had taken place a great increase in luxury among the rich and at the court, and this was accompanied, as always, by an avarice that was crushing the poor and seizing upon every opportunity for enslaving the peasant class. The time was overdue for an outbreak of righteous indignation, for a recovery of the essentials of faith and worship, and God found his messenger among the herdmen of Tekoa.

It is interesting, however, to note that not only had Amos had predecessors in the prophetic office between Elijah and himself who had taken a more independent line, but there is an earlier incident of an unnamed prophet recorded at some length in 1 Kings xiii, which serves to set Amos in right relief. It is a strange story of a man of God who came out of Judah to cry out

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against the false worship which Jeroboam the First had set up in Bethel. After an altercation with Jeroboam, in which the king's hand had been stricken at the word of the prophet, and restored again, the king invited the prophet to eat bread with him, which he declined, declaring that he had been charged as part of his mission to eat and drink nothing in the contaminated place. But the son of an old prophet living at Bethel told his father of the incident and the old man sent his son to intercept the man of God from Judah, and to persuade him to turn aside and sup with him, enforcing his invitation by falsely declaring that he had received a divine command to that effect. The invitation was accepted, and, after his meal, the man of God while making his way homeward was slain by a lion, whereat the old prophet of Bethel repented of the deception he had practised. It is a pathetic and mysterious story; and some modern critics have thought they could detect in it another version of the visit of Amos to Bethel. This is, of course, impossible; the story, if true, happened 150 years earlier, and the close resemblances, though striking, are mere coincidences; but the story helps us to a better understanding of the mission of Amos.

## Amos

It marks the attempt of a more enlightened prophetism endeavouring to break away from the old conventions and falling to temptation. But now the new movement can register complete emancipation ; another voice from Judah is heard at the altar of Bethel, and this time it is unflinchingly faithful, and beyond bribery or threat.

We must try to visualise this person who stands for so much in the history of the Hebrew Prophets, for he is not only their head, but he contains in germ nearly everything that they contend for. How comes it that he understood so clearly the law of God's judgment, discerned His call, and predicted the coming of His wrath upon Israel forty years before it fell ? There is something sufficiently astonishing in the emergence of such a man and in the clearness of vision he attained. Can we find anything that helps us to understand why the call should single him out ? In doing so we are not attempting to reduce the obvious fact of a new revelation to a mere conglomeration of favourable circumstances through which, by purely natural means, Amos came to his religious convictions ; but neither need we refuse to look round for circumstances which educated him

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sufficiently to enable him to receive the revelation. We may assume that God is always seeking for those who can understand His will and receive His revelation, and that He finds them most readily among those whose previous experience has made them more likely to perceive and respond. What had Amos which made him more capable of apprehending God's purpose? We can perhaps look for something in his lonely life. The man who lives out-of-doors looking after sheep, who sees nature in all her aspects, who watches under the stars at night, will often be alive to voices which may be missed by the man immersed in the business of cities or distracted by the crowded companionship of the town. Some critics seem to be quite certain that the beautiful nature passages in Amos are interpolations, but they give just the feeling about God that we might expect in one who lived much alone with nature. There is something vast in the heavens and cleansing in the wind that often begets in man wide and noble views of God :

For lo, He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is His thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth ; the Lord, the God of hosts, is His name (iv. 13).



## Amos

Seek Him that maketh the Pleiades and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night ; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth ; the Lord is His name (v. 8).

We may at any rate imagine that out alone in the stark and staring wilderness of Tekoa this man might have attained truer thoughts of God than were likely to have been found by those who were reclining on cushions in Samaria, drinking away the hours and beguiling them with song, while their peasants sweated and toiled for them in the fields.

But Amos was not a mere rustic, he cannot have been an ignorant and isolated person who had never before stirred from his country field and tiny plot. It is obvious from his extensive naming of places in Canaan that he knew his geography well. In his opening speech he mentions towns outside the borders of his own land ; Gaza, Tyre, Damascus. He knows about the people of Edom and Moab. He has learned enough of the history of the surrounding peoples to know that the Philistines came from Crete, and the Syrians from Kir. Here evidently is a man who has travelled. He may have journeyed with his sheep or their fleeces to distant markets, and there

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he would hear stories of the latest atrocities of the Syrians, the barbarities of the Philistines, the treachery of Edom ; and then back to his lonely farm where he had time to ponder these things until he burned with indignation at the wrongs that men were doing. Nevertheless he is a typical peasant. Although he can write, it is obvious that his mind is filled, not with literary allusions, but with pictures taken from the country-side and from incidents natural to his calling. Again and again his illustrations are those which would occur to an agriculturalist and a country-dweller. The groanings of oppression or the rumblings of retribution are like the groaning of the threshing-floor when the wagons laden with sheaves creak and rumble in ; the remnant that will be saved from the coming disaster is like the torn fragment of a lamb's carcass rescued from the marauding beast of prey ; when he contrasts God's demands for righteousness with Israel's social conditions he sees it like a plumb-line set against a crooked wall ; when he wants to illustrate the law that nothing happens without a cause and that events which make a noise in the world indicate the activity of God, he thinks of the sudden snap of the snare springing up to catch

## Amos

the creature that has touched it, of the difference between the lion's cry roaring after his prey, and the satisfied growl of the young lion feasting on the carcase he has dragged into his den. All this is racy of the soil. But while it is the writing of a countryman, it is not to be assumed that it is rude and without the finish delighted in by the artistic sense. His speech is so finely tempered that it cuts like a sword, and his utterances fall with the regular beat of a flail. He knows the value of repetition: "for three transgressions, yea, for four" (that is, more than enough to deserve what they will receive), he reiterates as he sweeps round the horizon with his indictment of the peoples. "Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord," he thrice repeats when he recalls how already God has given manifestations of judgment, and without effect. We are by no means lacking in other examples of what a perfect literary style can be attained by the unlearned. Indeed, there is something much more direct, vigorous and telling in the style of one who has not been corrupted by the sentimentality and subtlety of too much literary education. It is enough to mention Bunyan with his strong, picturesque style, his clean-cut phrases and vivid

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description. The outlook of Amos may be that of the peasant, but it enables him to see all the more clearly because of that ; for the peasant is accustomed to live near natural necessities and to judge by well tried instincts. When Amos looks at the ivory-inlaid houses, when he sees folk spending their days lolling on divans, singing idle songs, drinking wine out of costly vessels, it is not envy at a lot so different from his own that moves him to scorn ; it is the fact that this idleness is purchased by the toil and taxation of others who must labour to produce the wealth which they squander and to provide the luxuries which surround this over-scented, languourous lolling life, which no healthy body needs or could even endure. But it is when such people pretend to be religious that the indignation of Amos can no longer be restrained. He is no accepted prophet ; he has none of the gifts which the seers profess ; he has not been trained at any prophetic community, but when these evils multiply to destruction, speak he must. So he journeys to Bethel where the royal chapel is situated and this combination of luxury, ceremonial and oppression has its head, secures an audience among the throngs of worshippers

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and there he delivers his soul of the oracle of Jehovah.

The opening address of Amos is a masterpiece of indictment, but his indignation has not so carried him away that he does not know how to secure the attention of his hearers, and by gaining an initial measure of agreement, carry them by the very logic of the situation to admit that they themselves stand condemned. He begins with proclaiming the doom of Damascus, whose sins are more than ripe for punishment. Now Damascus was the enemy of Israel, and at that time her most formidable enemy ; and no doubt he found eager acceptance of his prediction that Syria would be driven into exile. Then he swings round to Gaza, one of the chief cities of the Philistines, old hereditary enemies, and so to Tyre, one of the cities of Phœnicia, and then to the peoples of Edom, Ammon and Moab, outlining the outstanding iniquities of their behaviour ; all the time his audience agreeing that such folk deserved anything that happened to them ; for it is marvellous how much angrier we can get about the sins of our neighbours than about our own. But there is something very different in Amos from that hatred of the

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foreigner which, among all peoples, can be set in motion in order to put an edge to their patriotism. It must be noted why he accuses these nations; it is their frightful inhumanity, and this is marked not only when it has been inflicted upon Israel. Damascus had threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron; which means either that they literally adopted the horrible torture of placing their captives under a threshing instrument, or it is used metaphorically for the cruel way in which they have invaded the country and oppressed the inhabitants. Philistia and Phœnicia are both blamed for the way in which they have enslaved whole populations and sold them to servitude in Edom. We are not told that they were Israelites who were so treated; it is said that these coast towns did a large trade in slavery from captives exported from overseas. In the case of Tyre there is the additional evil that in taking part in this slave trade they had repudiated the brotherly covenant. It is not clear whether Amos meant the brotherhood that ought to exist between all peoples; that seems almost too modern an idea, though Amos is still a good deal more advanced than many who call themselves civilised and religious even

## Amos

now. Perhaps we are safer in inferring that this traffic involved the breach of some treaty, though with whom it was made we do not know ; for it is a common enough thing for nations to break treaties when it suits their purpose, and especially if it places an unwelcome restriction upon a lucrative trade. But our prophet is gloriously impartial ; for when he comes in turn to deal with Moab, he condemns them for having burned the bones of the king of Edom ; and Edom he had already condemned because of the slaughter they had inflicted upon some closely related tribe. Yet, when it is Edom's turn for judgment there is no rejoicing that their punishment has come, but instead a condemnation of the nation that has inflicted it, and then chiefly because they have committed an act which outraged primitive feeling. For the burning of the bones of their king need not mean that they had roasted him in a lime kiln alive, but that they had desecrated his grave and burned his remains ; to any Semite an act of horrible sacrilege. No doubt this outrage was perpetrated in order to strike at the very heart of the people ; it was an act of humiliation, perhaps to destroy some object which had become a centre of national aspiration, a method



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not unknown in the punitive expeditions of modern civilised peoples. Thus the whole of Amos' condemnation of Israel's heathen neighbours is for their barbarous warfare, their lack of humanity, for treaty-breaking, for calculated outrage. They are all judged by that natural law which individuals would recognise, but which nations, acting as such, and for the purposes of military effect, or commercial advantage, will not scruple to break.

But now, having worked up indignation at the inhumanity of these foreigners, he turns to condemn Israel itself. The condemnation of Judah, although it would no doubt have been equally welcome to his hearers, seems to be on a different level and is, therefore, judged by the critics to have been inserted later. The judgment on Israel is not that they also ill-treated their neighbours, but because within their own borders they have allowed unrighteous deeds, sanctioned inhuman behaviour. They will unite in condemning deeds done by foreigners to their enemies, but they have done as much to their own people. They have sold their own folk into slavery because they were in debt, sometimes when the debt was no more than a pair of shoes. They even

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“pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor.” This is an obscure charge, and some have taken it to be a satirical description of land avarice which had become such a passion, that they covet the earth on the uncovered head of the peasant dusty from his work in the fields or his walking on the roads: the dust which no doubt the nicely bathed and covered folk professed to regard as disgusting. If it does not mean this, then it either means that they grudged the earth which the mourners cast on their heads, or that they longed to crush the heads of the poor to the very dust. Then Amos turns to the worship, which was evidently assiduously performed. In his condemnation of a man and his father going in to “the maid,” there seems to be a reference to the unholy custom of keeping prostitutes attached to sacred places. This practice was not due, simply, to licentiousness seeking sanction under the name of religion, but was a definite practice of many of the Semitic cults, adopted under the idea that it induced fertility in the soil and among the people; but, custom or no, Amos is revolted at it. The very garments upon which they stretch themselves so luxuriously as they recline at the sacrificial feasts

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have been taken as a pledge from the backs of some needy and naked person, and they can afford huge draughts of wine at these gatherings, because they are purchased with the heavy fines they have inflicted upon the poor. Amos does not seem to have objected to the use of idols in the worship of Jehovah ; for he says not a word against the golden calves of Bethel ; any form of worship, any ritual, accompanied by social injustice, rouses his wrath—what particular worship or ritual it may be matters little beside that. And yet his reference to “ their God ” is surely contemptuous ; such a God is not the one he has come to know in the silence of the night and in the solitude of his own heart.

But he goes on to press home upon his hearers that this is the only return they are making for all God has done for them as a nation ; for His great deliverance from Egypt and His gift to them of the promised land. It is a distinct charge of religious ingratitude which reveals the man's own simple religion and loyal faith. He has no contempt for the prophet bands or for the nazirite vows which some had taken, even though he does not belong to any of them ; instead he regrets that these movements for simplicity and abstinence

## Amos

have been corrupted by debauchery and that the voice of prophecy has been silenced by threats. Therefore, while Amos acknowledges that God has made a special revelation of Himself to Israel, instead of that securing for them favoured treatment when His judgments sweep the world, he believes that it will only expose them to the sterner condemnation. It must have sounded a curious logic to their ears; even as we read it to-day, we are conscious of an unexpected conclusion to the argument: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: *therefore* I will visit upon you all your iniquities." Yet it is obvious, on reflection, that Amos has penetrated to the absolute truth concerning God's dealings with men. Partly to be traced to the wisdom of God beyond our partial understanding, and partly to the different levels of culture and religious sensibility which are due to natural conditions, as also to the beneficent arrangement by which we depend upon one another for the mediation of religious insight, there are some persons and there are some nations who are entrusted with special revelation. But this special revelation is no sign of favouritism, nor of arbitrary election; but is solely that the revelation thus given may

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be spread more swiftly and widely through all the world.

There are two dangers which always accompany a special revelation, and which are due to our tendency to individual and racial pride, namely, to think that superior religious illumination gives us licence to be careless concerning the general moral law, while the revelation given to be imparted to others is kept to ourselves and turned into an excuse for boasting and exclusiveness. We have only to set these things clearly before our minds to see their obvious perversion ; yet it is one that is persistent and still continues. Amos uses every artifice to bring this mistake home to the consciences of his audience. He circles round, condemning the peoples dwelling beyond Israel's borders, and securing a verdict of condemnation because of their inhumanity ; and then suddenly comes down upon Israel itself for doing the same things, and thinking that they are somehow atoned for, or even sanctioned, by an excess of religious observances ; that God will wink at these things in the case of Israel, because He has a favour to the nation and has selected it for a great task. Amos shows that the argument is all the other way.

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This error has dogged the theory of revealed religion and the doctrine of election so persistently that in order to break the pernicious inference men have denied that there is any such thing as a special revelation or a distinctive call, thereby reducing the strongest convictions of men and peoples to an illusion and ignoring historical and existing facts. That with Israel the knowledge of God was purer than elsewhere, had a more wonderful witness and persistent advance, is patent to any just comparison ; and there is no sufficient natural explanation of this traceable merely to Israel's race, geographical influences or national experience. That God does visit some men with a special revelation and a more vivid call is as obvious as anything can be, and even psychology cannot discover the entire cause of such distinctions. This special call often separates a man or nation from the ordinary life, always brings with it suffering and isolation, and, therefore, ought not to provoke envy in those who are unwilling to pay a similar price ; while it is given simply and solely that the " elect " should become the servants of revelation, the missionaries of the nations and an apostolate to all the world. If this were remembered, especially

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in connection with the claims of the Christian religion, it would do a great deal to remove that feeling of favouritism which has stolen into some conceptions of Christianity and which has caused such resentment among enlightened unbelievers. What additional benefit does a special experience, or access to more covenanted means of grace, bestow upon the Christian soul? It may be answered in a word: increased responsibility; not immunity from judgment, but exposure to greater severity, since we shall be judged according to the light we have received. The Christian stands therefore in greater peril of the Judgment than the heathen who know not Christ, and if any type of Christian, Catholic or Protestant, Evangelical or Liberal, is disposed to pride himself upon more certain grace, more inward illumination, let him remember that for all these things he must be brought into judgment, and that where much is given much will be expected.

To think, in addition, that any special favour grants an indulgence to sin, that emotional experiences of God, or the performance of ceremonial acts, are a substitute for plain honesty and social justice are perversions towards which Amos is unsparing. He takes the expectation of



## Amos

the " Day of the Lord " and shows that this may entail something quite different from the popular hope it embodied. This is the earliest literary record of an idea which became frequent on the lips of the later prophets, and which has coloured religious thought even down to our own time. It expresses the conviction that there is an event hidden in history, partially manifesting itself in all happenings, yet revealing itself in outstanding crises and gathering to one final consummation, in which God will manifest Himself and bring all things to the bar of justice. The Israelites were expecting this Day to bring some overwhelming manifestation of God, but apparently it was to operate mainly in the discomfiture of their enemies. But Amos teaches that the Day of the Lord will be a general judgment, which will be entirely indiscriminating save on the issue of moral integrity and social justice. " Woe unto you that desire the Day of the Lord ! Wherefore would ye have the Day of the Lord ? it is darkness and not light."

In the demand which Amos pressed for simple righteousness as the only adequate service of Jehovah, it is a question whether he did not think it advisable to abolish the whole apparatus of

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external symbolical worship. The following passage seems to read that way. It is in line with a good many modern proposals, for the cure of perverted religion ; and it has undoubted echoes in the other prophets.

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer Me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them ; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from Me the noise of thy songs ; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a perennial stream. Did ye bring Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel ? (v. 21-25).

This is a most important passage. Unfortunately its concluding question is capable of more than one interpretation. It looks as if Amos held the idea that the whole sacrificial system was a mistake, and that God required no such service. It would not be surprising if the Hebrew prophets should have come to doubt whether God demanded animal sacrifices, for, of course, the Christian religion, which in so many ways they anticipated, does reveal that they are useless for the worship of God or for cleansing from sin. But it is an extraordinary claim which Amos seems to make, namely, that sacrifices

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formed no part of the original worship of Jehovah as it was practised during the wandering in the wilderness. Readers will be aware of the critical hypothesis that the Levitical system owes its systematisation to a later age, and that it has been ante-dated to the origination of Moses ; and that, in particular, the Tabernacle had no actual existence, but is an idealisation projected backwards to the wilderness period from the worship of the Second Temple. But, even though this is accepted, critics would not hold that there was therefore no external symbolical worship, and particularly no sacrifices, previously to the settlement in Canaan ; for Israel would then have presented a curious anomaly among the early nations of the world, who all practised sacrifice, which was indeed involved in the very act of slaying animals for food. If this is what Amos means, then we are compelled to believe that he was misinformed on a matter of history. We should be helped in our decision by the next verse, but unfortunately that is obscure and probably corrupt : “ Yea, ye have borne Siccuth your king and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves.” Does this mean that it was not Jehovah to whom the

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offerings were made, but these heathen gods? But if these names are to be taken to be the names of gods, then they are Assyrian gods, who could not have been worshipped by Israel at these dates. It seems simpler to read: "Ye have borne the tabernacle of your king, and the shrine of your images, the star of your God," and that this refers to current observances in which religious processions with sacred symbols were being practised; increased ritual in the place of justice and righteousness! Some scholars think that Amos means it was not *only* sacrifices that were offered in the wilderness, and that life was more consistent with worship in these primitive times. The impression remains, however, that Amos was not simply pleading for a life more in accordance with the elaborate worship that was being offered; and neither was he concerned for a reform of external worship by adopting more spiritual forms of expression; for he is just as much opposed to the music in which some would find the true "sacrifice of thanksgiving."

It looks as if Amos were a rigid Puritan, and his hatred for the combination of robbery and the religious feast had gone so far as to demand that external worship be altogether abandoned and

## Amos

social righteousness be regarded as the sole acknowledgment of God that was necessary ; and in this he can claim the support of Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah. It is quite possible to understand the impatience aroused in him when he saw this ritualistic worship combined with luxury and social injustice, and his desire to sweep the whole thing away. He makes no distinction between worthy and unworthy symbols of worship, such as were being used at Bethel in the golden calves which Jeroboam had set up ; he does not distinguish between animal sacrifices and songs of thanksgiving ; the whole business of special religious acts of worship had become so associated with hypocrisy and oppression that he would advocate their entire abolition. If that is so, then we can only say that Amos was wrong, and we must look to other prophets for a correction of his outlook. For it is a proposal which, carried to its logical conclusion, would dispense not only with every symbolical, but any verbal expression of the worship of God ; there would soon be nothing to remind us of our social duties ; an wholly immanent religion would soon cease to be a religion at all, but become a pure ethic, and, in time, not much of an ethic at that. History

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has tried this way too, and a remedy it certainly is not. Here Amos' clear vision of the one thing needful has blinded him to the necessity of outward worship, because it had become wrongly associated with false life and social wrongs. Unfortunately this association is constantly found in history, but that is due to human perversion, not to anything inseparable from the desire to express worship in outward acts, which can be shown to be absolutely necessary to religion. But if this is the outlook of Amos, and there must always be the doubt whether he meant anything quite so rigorous as this, we must make allowance for the righteous indignation that prompted it, as we must listen to the same condemnation to-day when men, coming straight from simpler life and confronted with the ignorance, the misery, the luxury and the vice of our time, ask in anger what the churches are doing beside their elaborate services and their perpetual hymn-singing, which give a false impression to many people by encouraging them to think that this alone is pleasing to God, or will avert the coming doom. If it is an exaggeration, we must honour the indignation that creates it, and recognise the pre-existing exaggeration in the

## Amos

other direction, which is really to blame. If this is the only note in a particular revelation, we must not complain that it is sounded too loudly ; people must be made to hear this whatever else they listen to ; and emphasis, and even over-emphasis, may at certain times be necessary in order to make men see the truth.

How was Amos' message received ? We gather little from his book as to whether people in general were deaf to his appeal or rejected his indictment ; but there is one incident of extraordinary interest that Amos has recorded for us : his encounter with Amaziah the priest of Bethel. It is not at all surprising that this person was considerably disturbed by the appearance of Amos. He heard his message, or it was reported to him, and all his instincts were aroused. It was obvious that he did not like the man's message ; how should he ? It was full of denunciation and the announcement of danger ; but he advanced a somewhat strange reason for disliking it, as men will on such occasions. He sent to Jeroboam to tell him that Amos was raising a conspiracy against him. Now this was not true, but how easily it could be made to sound true ! If a preacher dares to say that a revolution is coming he can easily be charged



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with endeavouring to bring one about. The most innocent declaration of truth can be made to look like sedition, and the warnings as to what will happen if certain practices continue, be twisted to mean an incitement to violence. Even our Lord, whose teaching was so opposed to violence, and who so carefully distinguished His kingdom from that of this world, yet seemed to Caiaphas, Herod and Pilate, a most dangerous person and a fomenter of trouble. But Amaziah was not only concerned for his royal master ; he disliked Amos' violent and overpowering utterance. He said, "The land is not able to bear all his words." He objected to his style ; and no wonder ! It is a style as little adjusted to the delicate situations in which royal chaplains often find themselves as the use of a sledge hammer to crack a nut. It was a wearying style, for Amos had a love of repetition, and he never stayed until he had hammered his point home to men's minds in a way they could never forget. But perhaps most interesting in this encounter is the opinion that Amaziah formed of the man he had to deal with. He does not seem to have been an evil-disposed person, for all his dislike of Amos. He advises him to get away back to Judah and earn his living

## Amos

there. Let him remember Bethel is the king's sanctuary and a royal residence. He should not come and disturb the royal presence and the appointed services with his fulminations, or expect anyone to take any notice of his uncouth southern accent and his violent speech ; it was no place for that sort of thing. If he must prophesy, he had better keep to his own locality where people will be more ready to receive his message, and give him support ; let him get back to his rustic surrounding, where people know him, and where he can dispense with the knowledge and training that international questions and government policies demand. Amos replies to Amaziah that he is no professional prophet looking to get his living from some royal patron ; he is a plain countryman and peasant farmer, but it is God who has called him and God who has sent him. And then he breaks out into further denunciation by predicting what will befall Amaziah himself. We need not suppose that it was merely personal feeling which moved him to foretell the awful sufferings that would befall both Amaziah and his royal master ; it means no more than that they will live to share in the horrors which are coming upon the nation.

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Before Amos left Bethel he was granted a vision which confirmed his faith in the word of the Lord. Hitherto his visions had been of common objects which he interpreted by what their appearance or the sound of their name suggested to him ; but now he has a vision of the Lord Himself. He saw God standing beside the altar proclaiming its entire destruction. If, after the rebuke of Amaziah, he had felt a moment's doubt, it was removed by this wonderful appearance. The capacity for receiving such a vision proves that Amos was spiritually developed, and not, as some have thought, without any profound religious instinct ; and in the case of one who had such exalted views of the transcendence of God, we must believe that the vision took a very wonderful form. And so he goes back to his home, tradition says, so badly mauled by being set upon as the result of Amaziah's intervention, that he died soon after ; no unlikely thing in itself, but it is unnecessary to suppose that this actually happened, for he is able to write out at leisure and calmly, not only the account of how his mission ended, which is told with obvious irony, though without personal bitterness, but also to recover for us the essence of his prophetic

## Amos

utterance, beating with the passion with which it was declaimed and burning still all these centuries after with the flame of his indignation.

It only remains for us to estimate the contribution Amos made to the development of Israel's religion, and to gather up the truth he has bequeathed to posterity. He has made a mighty stand for the absolute ethical impartiality of God's justice, which is turned aside by no considerations of favour, indeed, judging with all the greater severity where His mind has been revealed and His mercies made known. He stood thus early for the idea that religion is international, or nothing. If he does not rise to a concrete declaration of absolute monotheism, it is because his mind is not of the abstract kind; but his conception of God practically involves monotheism. He does not say that if Israel claims to have been delivered from Egypt by the hand of Jehovah, the other nations claim just as much for their gods; which is the argument a rationalist would be tempted to use; but declares that it is Jehovah Himself who has been guiding these nations also; and so he advances from a particular and positive belief to an universal idea of Providence. But he

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does not shrink from the logic of his faith: he believes that God cares for these nations just th much as for Israel. "Are ye not as the conldren of the Ethiopians unto Me?" What theoutrage the words must have seemed to his suarers: that God cared for the hated Egyptians, just as much as for them! If He had not made the same revelation to others, He yet had given them the same moral law which Israel had to observe and would also be judged by. If He had revealed more to Israel it was only that they should share it with others. Especially does Amos demand that religion should express itself in social justice; if it does not do this, sacrifices and ceremonial are not only no substitute for that expression, but they become an intolerable offence. The attempt to combine religious ritual and social injustice will bring down the unsparing retribution of God.

It is in his severe and unmistakable enunciation of these truths that Amos makes his great contribution to Israel's prophetic revelation, as well as to the universal understanding of religion for all time. He has expressed these truths with such biting clearness and scorching indignation, that

## Amos

wherever his words have become known, they have burned their way indelibly into the mind of man. And it is well that it should be so. Not even yet, after nineteen hundred years of Christianity, can we do without the message of Amos. The fatal idea of divine favouritism has sought to hide itself under every type of religion. For instance, Catholicism has often given the impression that it is a system where indulgence is secured through the sacrificial offering of the Mass or the operation of the Sacrament of Penance ; on the other hand, Evangelicalism has often given the impression that there is some magic in the blood of Christ which conceals sin and turns away retribution, or that faith in Christ can be a substitute for good works, ethical character and social justice. And these impressions give rationalism its chance, and bring shame upon religion. Such impressions cannot rightly be sustained upon a careful examination of what either Catholicism or Evangelicalism really teaches and stands for ; but by a subtle perversion and by the support which seems to be given by careless statement and inconsistent conduct, these false impressions get abroad and provide an occasion for ethical rationalism to propose itself as the only safeguard

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against these dangers, or for a programme of iconoclasm which proceeds upon the assumption that religion can be reformed by the simple suppression of ceremonial or the repression of formal piety. Faith is not a substitute for good works, but it is their creative impulse ; worship is the offering by the will of ourselves, our souls and bodies, to God, a symbolic offering of our labour and our social order ; and its external representation generates the inspiration by which that offering becomes more perfect and effectual. Enormous error would be avoided and a true reform would be prepared for, if only we could grasp the logic of Amos that special revelation brings special responsibility. Wherever there is a claim to know God intimately, there will be judgment according to the light received. Even at this far-off date we have not only to learn internationalism, we have to unlearn many of the lessons falsely gathered from the past, and especially from recent history, in order to appreciate with what absolute impartiality God will judge the nations. This doctrine does not mean that all nations have at any moment the same moral standard or position, or that all will be judged by the same standard ; but it does mean that



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superiority in any direction, material, intellectual or moral, is to be used for the sake of others who are less advanced, and that superior profession will entail the heavier judgment if it does not induce a superior ethical behaviour. For an impressive statement of these principles we can turn still to Amos, and the world may still tremble at his words ; for they will never be turned aside, least of all by pleading privilege.

When a person like Amos has been capable of thus understanding the secret of the mind of God, and has been so courageous and uncompromising in making it known, we can have nothing but reverence for the man, or gratitude for the service he has rendered religion. It is really no condemnation of the man or his message if we can discern something lacking in both which only further revelation has disclosed. It is when we come to compare Amos with his successor Hosea, with Jeremiah, or, still more, with the spirit of Christianity, that we begin to be aware that his outlook is not complete, and his method imperfect. It has been alleged that Amos was somewhat deficient in the religious sense. This cannot be inferred from the fact that he demands ethical conduct and social justice as the sole

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and only concern of religion. It must be remembered that he was attacking what was wrong, and demanding what was being omitted. His warning was of imminent retribution, and for the moment he had nothing to do with qualifications. Yet there is with our prophet a certain concentration on one line of demand which does leave others all the more clamouring for expression. There is not a word of forgiveness, there is hardly a clear call to repentance ; for the closing passage of the book (chapter ix verses 11 to 15) is almost unanimously rejected as a later addition. In the rest of the book there is nothing but unsparing condemnation and the unconditional proclamation of doom. The closing verses were probably added in order to make the prophecy suitable for public reading. The thoroughness with which the coming judgment is depicted, as seeking out its victims until vengeance has overtaken them all, is expressed in terrible language. There is to be no escape for them, though they dig into hell or climb up to heaven. The sea shall betray them to the serpent, and even in captivity the sword will find them out. God will show that He cares for Israel as little as for their enemies, whom they believed they were

## Amos

ordered to destroy. The destruction of Israel is wholly determined. Nor did Amos overestimate the fulness and finality of destruction ; for thus it actually came to pass, and the tribes of Israel so completely disappeared under the series of invasions which soon began, that they have vanished from the earth. From the fierceness of his words we may sometimes feel that Amos had a certain delight in being the bearer of doom, and that there is an element of vindictiveness, or, at least, of heartlessness, in his proclamation, especially in the careful closing of every way of escape. But this we have no right to infer. The man was wholly devoured by that indignation which works out in the moral law that certainly governs nations, and, therefore, must have its place in the mind and will of God. We cannot certainly assume that he rejoiced in his message or that he had no feeling of compassion ; but he is a prophet, and nothing more. We miss in him the human tenderness of Hosea, and still more that struggle between the mere messenger of doom and the lover of weak and sinful men which makes the message of Jeremiah at once weaker and stronger, and his personality confused and yet more natural. It may be that Amos did not

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discern the possible efficiency of using different arguments, of seeking to purify worship and directing its vast spiritual and emotional reactions into higher channels; it may be that he read history wrongly, and did not understand the need of human nature for some symbolic religious expression, if ethical and social life is to possess an unfailing inspiration; but at least he broke a fatal and vitiating connection between worship and injustice, and no violence can be too great where that exists.

Like the whirlwind he comes, and like the whirlwind he departs; there is little left standing when the storm has passed. But there are such things in the economy of God as whirlwinds, and societies and nations had better take note of the fact, and least of all imagine that the profession of privilege or the practice of a substitutionary ceremonial will provide the slightest shelter when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth.

## CHAPTER II

### Hosea

THE whirlwind mission of the prophet Amos cannot long have been concluded, and at least it must have been before his tempestuous attack had been forgotten, when the prophetic voice was again heard in Northern Israel, but this time more like a sighing breeze, rising occasionally to a short sharp buffet as of a blast, but soon dying away to a gentle murmur, a soft alluring zephyr whispering dreams of summer. There can hardly be conceived a greater contrast to the prophet Amos than the character, temperament and method presented by his almost immediate successor Hosea. That God should have used two men of such widely differing temperament and experience is itself an example of what wide diversity is necessary truly to interpret the divine word. That diversity is also necessary in order that the one message should correct the other; for with Amos alone as our guide,

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despite his wide outlook, ethical teaching and moral indignation, we should conceive the real attitude of God to man very imperfectly and inadequately. At the same time, we need to keep the stern message of Amos still sounding in our ears as the undertone of the sweeter harmonies of Hosea ; for man's understanding of the word of God does not mark a simple progression ; present revelation neither cancels, nor entirely takes up in a new apprehension the message of the past. The message of the past remains and, while enriched, balanced and complemented by subsequent revelation, contributes an enduring and essential element. This needs to be remembered in days when we are aware of the dawning of new truth. The new revelation always builds upon the past ; not by mere addition, so that each part is of exactly similar value ; nor by organic evolution in which the past is so entirely taken up and changed in the new that we need concern ourselves only with the latest development, but by a perpetual enrichment which gives profounder truth by means of a more complex harmony. Our Lord's great message itself was declared by Him not an abrogation of the past, even when it corrected

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and superseded much that had gone before, but rather its perfect fulfilment; that is, the rendering of the earliest dim intuitions in the completest fulness of their meaning.

The fact that God chose men of two such diverse temperaments as Amos and Hosea shows both the limitations under which the divine word works, and also the richness that it gathers through the variety of human disposition. We are bound to feel with both these men that, while the pressure of the divine word lifts them both far above their own natural thought and character, it is by a sublimation rather than by a suppression of their natural human character. It was the stern, rigorous character of Amos which made him best fitted as a channel for the proclamation of divine retribution; it was the passionate and poetic nature of Hosea that made him just the medium through which the divine mercy (which is hidden even in the heart of retribution) could make itself known. In addition, the experience of the two men was an instrument not only in forming their character, but in fitting them to receive a revelation of the purpose and nature of God; these things not altogether constituting the divine word itself, but preparing the possibility



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of its deeper understanding ; for revelation proceeds, not by the supernatural breaking in and destroying the natural, nor by the supernatural simply growing out of the natural, but rather by the elevation of the natural into the realm of the supernatural, or by the supernatural building upon the natural.

We know next to nothing of the personal life of Amos, probably because there was very little to know ; a solitary shepherd communing alone with God, his own thoughts burning within him till they tumbled forth in tumultuous utterance. We know at least one personal and private incident in the life of Hosea, which must have been a sorrowful and long drawn out domestic tragedy. This tragedy greatly enriched his character, deepening and making more tender his naturally passionate nature ; for he brought to an experience of domestic unhappiness not only a natural affection which could sustain many a shock and remained unalterable, but that disposition to seek for a meaning in things which makes all the difference to the effect that sorrow and suffering have upon character ; not to be identified with the curiosity which wants to find a detailed meaning and an immediate purpose

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in everything which befalls us (a practically impossible quest), but the moral discrimination which tries to discover how an event may be made to minister to the education of character by setting the spirit to rise superior to it, and by using it for the glory of God.

We learn of this tragedy in the life of Hosea, not merely because it happened, but because out of it Hosea came to wider views of the loving-kindness and forgiveness of God, through which his prophetic message was shaped into an understanding of the divine method, and his character refined by that human passion of merciful love in which the Divine is not only revealed but actually imparted to us; for "he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him." And Hosea did love, and suffered through his love; learning from his suffering, and loving all the deeper because of it. This seems to be the most natural interpretation of the strange story narrated in the first three chapters of his book. Taking the actual language of the book, we are told that Hosea was commanded by God to marry a woman of immoral character, with the not unexpected result that during her marriage she had two or three children who were not the

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children of Hosea. Now it is unthinkable to most modern expositors that Hosea should have received any such actual command from God, and they are mostly agreed in explaining this command as due to Hosea's interpretation of how God had been teaching him through this strange experience, so that looking back he could read into an event, itself naturally decided on, the carrying out of a divine purpose. Older expositors, still more offended by the moral improbability of the whole story, are driven to conclude that it was only an allegory, vividly depicted in the strongly imaginative mind of the prophet as an actual occurrence. There are examples in the prophets of the reception of commands from God to perform symbolic acts as part of their prophetic message, which it is very difficult to conceive could have been carried out literally ; but there is nothing quite parallel to this. No doubt the older expositors were supported in their symbolical interpretation by the feeling that it was inconceivable how any man, especially in those far-off days, when a wife was simply the property of her husband and any unfaithfulness would be punished by death, and in circumstances when even the most forgiving of men find every natural instinct

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hardening, should have risen to this height of almost quixotic magnanimity. If we are to believe that all these difficulties and objections were overcome in the case of Hosea, then we have to assume that this man must also have invested marriage with something akin to romantic affection, by no means a necessary or even normal phenomenon in those early days; although it should be noted that the Bible has romantic love stories, if only here and there, very early in its history. But it is precisely because Hosea was a man of such capacity for personal affection and had risen to such heights of forgiveness under the impulse of a pure and unselfish love, that he was able, so long before the New Testament was written, to arrive at some apprehension of that law laid down by our Lord that we can only be forgiven as we forgive, as well as of that magnificent declaration of the essential character of God reached by St. John when he declares, as a result of the revelation of God in Christ, that God is love itself.

Although the majority of modern expositors prefer the interpretation that Hosea read back into history a divine command, of which, when he married his wife, he had been quite unconscious,

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it might be well to keep an open mind for the idea that he married a woman of more than doubtful character, knowing what her character was, but loving her sincerely and desiring to redeem her, and this under a divine impulse. Such things have not been quite unknown in history, though they have often been unsuccessful. Nothing gives such an excellent analogy of God's attitude to man as this literal interpretation ; for that love of God which brought man into existence must also have foreseen how unfaithful he would become and what a tragedy it would all involve ; and yet, because He was love, He took all the risks and dangers of that, because He was seeking for man a still higher relationship than that which it was possible to begin with. It might also be well to follow the literal statement of the text that the first child that Gomer bore to Hosea was his own : " she conceived and bore *him* a son," which would also explain why this child had a name which casts no reflection upon its legitimacy ; it was called Jezreel. The child was so called in accordance with the common custom amongst the Israelites of giving names that marked an experience or hope connected with a child's birth. The meaning Hosea

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attached to this naming of his child was that of the great event connected with Jezreel, namely the wiping out of the House of Ahab by the assassin and usurper Jehu, which was now shortly to be avenged by the death of King Jeroboam II, a successor in that line. This enables us to date Hosea's prophecy as at least prior to 743 B.C., when that event occurred. But it also expresses the promise contained in the Hebrew word: "God will sow," which shows that, at any rate, at this time Hosea too believed in some sort of restoration. To both these significances of the name we shall have to refer again.

But two children followed whose names indicate that they were not Hosea's: a girl, Lo-Ruhamah, meaning "not (my) love," or, "no love of *mine*," and the boy, Lo-Ammi, which means "not my kin." But it seems that matters became even worse than this. Not only did Gomer turn out an adulterous wife, but, according to the third chapter, she seems to have left Hosea altogether and to have become a harlot slave; perhaps the slave concubine of another man, or, quite conceivably, one of the so-called sacred harlots, attached to one of the Canaanitish shrines. The modern expositors are agreed that the Lord

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commanded him to go and love her, despite her leaving her husband, and her descending one stage further in moral degradation, so that they are faced by the same difficulty which we have suggested might have been found at an earlier stage. The plain reading of the text implies, what is clearly expressed in the margin of the Revised Version, that this woman was beloved of her husband, that is by Hosea himself, although she was an adulteress and a harlot. But what the English text does not make clear to the reader, though it is clear enough from the Hebrew, is that this is the same woman and not another, which some of the older expositors took it to mean. So Hosea, moved by his natural love and by the divine command, bought this worthless woman back again, keeping her, though not living with her, at least for "many days" (no doubt until she had proved her repentance) as his wife; this express limitation enabling us to infer that the full relationship of husband and wife was eventually restored.

Now beyond all doubt this is a most extraordinary human story; rare enough, but it marks the measure of this man; it shows that his love was not merely physical or simply quixotic, for



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neither could rise to such a height as this. It must have had something in it comparable to that which the New Testament declares to be the essence of God, namely a love which is neither merely natural nor mere affection, yet while embracing these, and stronger than both, rises to a height of pure spontaneity, uncaused and undeserved, definitely seeking the redemption of a worthless character; a love moreover which is not disillusioned by its failure to redeem, nor repulsed by the treachery with which its advances are rewarded, but maintains itself in further and more daring attempts to attain its purpose, and persists even when failure seems final and hopeless. Such is the love of God and such must be divine charity when it comes to reside in man; it is obviously a supernatural grace, but Hosea had been prepared to receive it, and by its actual infusion, he had come to understand what God was like, and what must be His feeling even towards fickle and faithless Israel. For in and through this amazing experience Hosea saw a new meaning in the history of his own people, a meaning entirely beyond the comprehension of Amos. Hosea follows this feeling through all its shades of hope and despair as the clue to the love of

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God : never a mere leniency towards sin or capacity for easy forgiveness, such as the love of God has sometimes been mistakenly understood to be ; but, on the contrary, a love which sees and feels sin all the more just because it is love, shrinking from no measure, either of suffering to itself or of pain inflicted, in order to drive and discipline the unyielding soul back to its only redemption.

The analogy between this domestic experience and Israel's history is worked out in fine detail and extraordinary beauty : Hosea conceives Israel to have been betrothed to God in the Wilderness and married to Him by the Great Covenant of Sinai ; but Israel had proved an adulterous wife. By adultery Hosea means going after other gods, and especially worshipping the Canaanitish Baalim. The corruption of Israel's religion by this heathen worship needs some explanation. A syncretism had gradually taken place between the worship of the indigenous deities of the land (who were mere personifications of natural powers, especially of agricultural fertility and were worshipped under the name of the Baalim by the original inhabitants), and the moral and covenanted religion of Jehovah. That this had already taken

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place in his time can be discerned from the prophecy of Amos ; but Amos does not specifically attack this worship, for apparently he hardly traces the immoral, anti-social practices, which stirred his indignation, to this cause. It registers a great advance in Hosea, that he saw this syncretistic worship was proving a confusing and corrupting factor in the national life. Jehovah was still being worshipped in name, though even the name was being covered up by the ascription to Him of the word "Baal," which was itself a quite natural transference, because it simply means "lord," or possessor ; but both in conception and practice the idea of Jehovah's nature was being coloured by the conception of the Canaanitish Baal, or Baalim (for this natural god was so inadequately conceived that he was regarded as practically a different deity connected with each locality). These Baalim were supposed by the Canaanites to be the patrons of fertility, the gods who owned the land, which would only yield its increase when they were duly recognised. The importance of worshipping Jehovah suffered from a certain disadvantage in the common mind because He was not the natural possessor or Baal of the land ; many of the people may have

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conceived that He belonged only to Sinai. Therefore, alongside His worship, it appeared at least prudent to recognise the local deities for agricultural purposes, that is for material prosperity ; the inevitable result being that the gods of material benefit overshadowed the God of the moral covenant. The Northern Kingdom, unlike the South, had very rich and fertile lands, and these, responding to easy tillage, brought great prosperity to Israel, under which there seems to have set in great moral depravity. This prosperity was naturally traced to the favour of the local deities, and it brought their worship into considerable popularity. Israel did not know " that it was I who gave her the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and multiplied unto her silver and gold, which they made into the image of Baal." They did not regard Jehovah as also the God of nature.

As so often happens in religious history, the Supreme God fades into the background in competition with what are conceived to be the more accessible deities from whom are derived the gifts of nature. According to Hosea, God is now going to take measures which will clear away this confusion for ever. He predicts a

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time of great scarcity in which it will be discovered that all appeal to the local deities is vain; for this pagan religion can only flourish under material prosperity: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart." This probably refers not to the threatened captivity, but to the coming of wilderness conditions.

The simple idea on which Hosea is here working, that God is behind the forces of nature and can use them for the discipline of His people, is one somewhat difficult for us to grasp, since we regard those forces as acting according to unalterable laws which yield to man's knowledge and industry, but in which we can discern little moral discrimination, either when nature brings prosperity or withholds her gifts. But in a profounder analysis we can see that the prophet is right. God does use the imperfect correspondence of nature to man's needs, even when her laws are faithfully followed, to reveal that this life consists of more than meat and drink, and under the action of natural calamity man is bound to look for some deeper meaning to life. In such times God often speaks to the heart.

Hosea appears to think that such times will

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pass and a new covenant will be made in which there will be a return to prosperity, due to the faithfulness with which the new betrothal is kept: "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in justice, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. . . . and the earth shall answer with corn and wine and oil." Here again, if we ponder sufficiently, we can see the inter-working of moral and natural law. A great many of the distresses humanity suffers, due to famine and scarcity, would be immensely relieved if society were based, not upon national and individual selfishness, but upon righteousness and justice, kindness and mercy, and if these were allowed full play, not only in the human heart, but in the organisation of commerce and finance. It is only on a basis of social justice and close and friendly international relationships that man can secure a prosperity sufficient for the needs of all. Jesus Himself takes up this attitude when He teaches us to pray, and places right in the centre of our petitions, after we have asked for the hallowing of God's name, and the doing of His will on earth: "give us this day our daily bread"; which leads naturally to the petition: "forgive us our

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trespasses" ; for it is in distributing the necessities of life that we have sinned so gravely against one another.

It is difficult to discover when Hosea thinks this disaster is likely to happen, because elsewhere he predicts another calamity, namely, the invasion of Assyria and the captivity of Israel. This brings up, as with Amos, the vexed question of how much Hosea really believed in the possibility of restoration. Some of the passages in which this is set forth are regarded with great suspicion by the critics, and with sufficient reason : there are others which seem to be in the identical style of Hosea. We need not stay to discuss this in detail, but it may be set down as a general principle that there is nothing absolute about this prophet's predictions : both the proclamations of doom and the promises of restoration are alike dependent upon the people's repentance as they discern the meaning of God's judgment. It is this varying outlook which makes this book so difficult to interpret in detail ; many passages are suspected as later interpolations ; there are others where the text is so obscure that no meaning can be extricated from it ; and, in addition, the moods of Hosea are so changeable that the tenor



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of a passage is not sustained for more than a few verses, and then something entirely new and unconnected seems to break in. His writings leave the impression of a beautiful lake, now reflecting in its placid depths the glory of the summer sky, and then almost without warning, swept by a storm, the surface so broken that it no longer even mirrors the colour of the sky above.

This changeableness of temperament in Hosea is no doubt partly due to the conflict taking place in the man's own nature; his clear vision that retribution is coming upon Israel, and the sorrow with which he regards such an event so wringing his heart that he is compelled to burst forth in some ejaculation of hope. The truth is that Hosea is an intense lover of his people, and although this love does not hide their fickleness and waywardness from his judgment, it constantly compels his hope and faith that things might be different; and this intense, emotional nature not only colours his outlook with the vision of possibilities that, alas, were never to be realised, but it has dominated all his conception of God.

It is to that conception of God that we must now turn our attention, for it is precisely Hosea's

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passionate nature which has enabled him to conceive of God in a way which far surpasses anything found in the prophet Amos, and which is almost unparalleled until we come to the revelation of God in the New Testament. Hosea does not hesitate to ascribe to God the varied emotions which find expression in human care and love. This never means that with Hosea God is easy-going concerning human sin, but that even when punishment must come, the heart of God is torn by the prospect of having to visit suffering upon his children. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee Israel? . . . Mine heart is turned within Me, my compassions are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man." This ascribes to God tenderness, even in His judgments, far beyond anything man himself displays or can even comprehend. Behind any pain God inflicts upon man there is the greater pain of His own heart in inflicting it. God's love for man in his most fickle moods and worthless ways is something so tremendous that He cannot bear the thought of leaving man to himself. And so Hosea is not afraid to image God

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as playing a sort of game with men, a divine hide-and-seek, so that men might be moved to feel after Him; God hides His face until they turn to Him again. This is not only a true reading of the meaning of history and of how God seeks through judgment to move men to a truer knowledge of Himself and a more enduring relationship; but the experience of some of the greatest saints has compelled them to believe that God is always playing this game of love; when His consolations are thick upon us we often take advantage of it, or remain at a standstill, and then He withdraws His face, and desolation comes upon us, until we seek a closer union with Him at a higher level of unselfish love.

Hosea takes even another step further in the interpretation of the ways of God. He is profoundly concerned over the confusion which has taken place between the naturalistic religion associated with the worship of the Baalim and the moral relationship which is at the basis of Jehovah's covenant with man. In particular he is incensed at the licentious rites which have apparently now also become associated with the worship of Jehovah and have led to the wholesale corruption of morals in Israel, and he therefore proposes that

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the word "Baal" shall never be applied to Jehovah again. This is not a mere matter of correct theological nomenclature; it is that the word itself conveys a wrong impression of God's relationship. But he does not propose that instead of this name man shall rise to some more transcendent and rarified conception of God, but rather to one which is more intimate and personal. Baal means possessor, master, lord; it was the word and the idea that was generally used for a man's relation to his wife. Hosea proposes that to indicate the true relationship between Jehovah and Israel, "it shall be at that day, that thou shalt call Me Ishi; and shalt call Me no more Baali." Now Ishi means "my husband," or, literally, "my man"; it stands for a purely personal, friendly relationship; and that is what God desires man to feel about Himself. If God is not only our creator and owner, still less is He merely an impersonal law: He stands to us in precisely the relationship of a passionate lover, one who seeks our love as much as we need His. It is amazing to consider how Hosea could possibly have arrived at such a conception of God: there is involved in it an entirely new view of human marriage, one resting not upon possession,

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but upon full, mutual love ; there is involved in it such a conception of the relation of God to the soul as is hard to realise until the Incarnation has taken place and Jesus Christ has become the seeking Saviour and the Divine Lover of the soul. Advanced mystical experience has dared to ascribe to that relationship the image of a spiritual marriage ; but Hosea has already reached this all these centuries ago, and reached it no doubt, because he has discovered that there is nothing of any final value or power in human relationship save a spontaneous, unchangeable love ; something more even than a basis of justice and righteousness ; an outgoing of mercy and of tender kindness ; and he cannot see how there is any hope for man unless God is like that.

He does not simply use for the love of God the ordinary word for human affection ; he has one word *hesed*, of which he is particularly fond : it is a word difficult to translate in our own language ; we need goodness, mercy and kindness taken together to bring out its full meaning. It always has in it a note of great tenderness, of fellow feeling, and yet it never degenerates into mere sentimentality ; it is a love of passion and a love of feeling and, therefore, in man comes and

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goes : “ your *hesed* is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth early away ” ; but in God it is a permanent characteristic, a feeling towards man which never changes ; a feeling which issues in constant desire for man’s highest happiness and which uses every possible means to bring him to it. Although, therefore, God is God and not man, the difference between the two natures is not that we cannot attribute to God the same depth of feeling that we can to man, or that the moral distinctions of the one cannot be applied to the other, but with God they are without imperfection and above all fickleness. It is in this idea that Hosea has mounted nearest to the New Testament conception of the love of God : a passionate and unchangeable seeking of man’s perfect good. This peculiar love which God had for Israel Hosea himself shares ; it is something more than what ordinarily passes under the name of patriotism, for it loves a people not so much for what they are, but in spite of what they are, and because of what it is discerned they could become. For this love does not enable the patriot-prophet to overlook the failings of his people, but enables him to discern them all the more, and to mourn their presence and their

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effect. But while he announces the fact of judgment as sternly as does Amos, the fellow-feeling which he retains for the sinful nation does not limit his discernment, but only gives him a deeper interest in all its activities; he shews a closer knowledge of Israel's past history, while his concern in current events is so close and intimate that his references to them escape our knowledge. To understand all the allusions to current historical events and local happenings would need a detailed commentary on every verse. This is impossible for us to follow here, but the closest identification that modern scholarship can provide should be sought by the careful student. It reminds one of the constant local references of Dante and repays study almost as much. The prophet is therefore naturally interested in contemporary politics, and he believes the policy which is being pursued of seeking help from Assyria and Egypt will only prove disastrous. He is the originator of that consistent policy of the Hebrew prophets not to trust to pagan alliances in order to secure their position against possible dangers. He seems, moreover, to have regarded Israel's breaking away from Judah and the setting up of a rival king as



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a political mistake and advocates the return to a united dynasty ; and when he outlines this in his prophecy, "afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king," it seems as if there flickers for a moment across his mind that ideal of the future which was to develop into the Messianic hope of "the Son of David."

We need only concern ourselves with the general outline of his analysis of the social situation. He complains that "there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. There is nought but swearing and breaking faith, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery ; they break out, and blood toucheth blood." This enumeration of what is lacking is remarkable ; it involves that there can be no social order unless these three things are present ; the love of truth, not only as an abstract thing, but in men's relationships one with another ; that while justice and integrity are necessary, there must be something more : a spirit of kindly concern and of real affection dictating all man's attitude to his fellows ; and this must all be strengthened and inspired by the knowledge that this is God's nature, this is God's demand. We have here,

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therefore, a complete weaving together of social justice, personal kindness, and profound religion. Like Amos, he contrasts these social defects with their accompanying religious observances, and measures them by God's demand in the famous saying, part of which is twice quoted by our Lord: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." The latter half of the verse perhaps enables us to interpret the former not to mean a complete abolition of sacrifice, but only that mercy is more important. It is not surprising to find, therefore, that Hosea is more discriminating in his judgment on religious ritual; he does not simply deem the whole thing as useless, and advocate its being swept away and replaced only by social justice; he seizes upon the invasion of corrupting customs, especially the images of calves used as symbols of Jehovah; it is these that he would destroy as degrading; similarly with the horrible practice of religious prostitution. But the rest he would leave as not essentially harmful if it is accompanied by social justice and upright character; he refers to the days when, in exile, the children of Israel shall be without the use of the accompaniments of worship:

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“ without sacrifice and without pillar, and without ephod or teraphim.” The pillar is apparently an obelisk marking a sacred place ; the ephod and teraphim are almost certainly images of Jehovah. And against these he seems to have no objection ; neither has he to the observances of “ new moons and sabbaths ” ; all these are, in his judgment, things that can be done without, but need not be, in so far as they are reminders and expressions of faith and helps to religious feeling. And here undoubtedly Hosea’s kinder spirit has given birth to a more patient but a more practical judgment ; our Lord Himself, while placing moral concerns before any observances, and the interior disposition as what counts beyond any ritual expression, never made the demand for one prohibit the use of the other ; He combined them not only in His own practical attitude, but He gave them both their right place in the famous words : “ These ye ought to have done and not to have left the other undone.”

It is this same spirit of kindness which enables Hosea to advance to an extraordinary discrimination of judgment, which challenges a great historic act of vengeance. When he calls his first child’s name Jezreel, it is prophetic of a time

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shortly to come when God will "avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu." The reader will remember the story in II Kings, ix f, of how Elisha anointed Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat, King over Israel, and commanded him to seize the throne and to exterminate the house of Ahab; and with what thoroughness and bloodthirstiness he carried out his task, in particular, his slaying the priests and worshippers of Baal by a treacherous subterfuge. Ahab and his household were an evil influence in Israel, and no doubt justly deserved their fate; and the Baal worship patronised by him was a source of religious danger and corruption; and yet Hosea looking back upon that event and judging it saw that this bloodthirsty vengeance was both an immoral act and a practical blunder, since it was bound to be avenged in turn by the overthrow of a usurping dynasty. Hosea saw thus early in history how vain merely repressive and vengeful methods are, for they make the avenger as great a monster as those upon whom his vengeance is wreaked, and sows history with unending feuds and encourages vain attempts to wipe out crime by still greater crime.

Hosea's loving message was as much in vain as

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the stern warning of Amos ; the human problem proved too much for the divine love. The chief defect in this people, which defeated the divine attempt to save them, was their amazing fickleness ; it is this perhaps which we ought to understand as even dominating the profession of repentance referred to in the opening verses of the sixth chapter : " Come, and let us return unto the Lord : for He hath torn, and He will heal us ; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us : on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him " (vi. 1, 2).

It is this belief that repentance is an easy matter and only a change in superficial feeling, and that even so it at once suffices to reverse the law of retribution, that makes it impossible to hope better things from this people. It is because their religion is superficial, and their ideas of repentance so shallow that the last hope vanishes.

And yet Hosea's message stands for all time, not only as a declaration of the unchanging attitude of God, but as an appeal which must at length find the heart of man, deepen his ethics by deepening his religion, and at last establish him in righteousness.

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It is to come down to much smaller matters to concern ourselves with the style of Hosea, but we cannot help noticing here again the great difference between him and Amos. The style of Amos is wrought in iron which rings out with metallic clearness, smashing home with a chorus of reiteration and shattering denunciation; Hosea's style, on the other hand, is so broken that it is even obscure to the point of unintelligibility, which is no doubt partly responsible for the corruption into which the text has fallen. It is almost impossible to get a continuous passage in Hosea extending over more than a few verses, so broken is his utterance by the swift changes in his emotions, no word of vengeance being spoken without his heart being moved by pity to some passionate entreaty or compassionate lament, only to return once more to speak the word of inexorable justice. But this cannot conceal his true poetic power or hinder his capacity for giving clear utterance to the divine word. Therefore we have in Hosea sayings that have become perpetual proverbs: "like people, like priest"; "they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind"; while his "whoredom and new wine take away the heart" have passed into the

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expression "women and wine," so common even in modern times (though far less tastefully expressed) to indicate the temptations to which men so often fall a prey.

Thus we take leave of a man who has been called quite justly "the Jeremiah of Israel," but whose character often reminds us of that of our Lord Himself in its tender love for sinful and erring man.



## CHAPTER III

### Micah and Zephaniah

THE books of Micah and Zephaniah can be profitably studied in close conjunction; they fall little more than a century apart, and they represent, though in differing degree, a republication of the great messages entrusted to Amos and Hosea. These last-named prophets owed their greatness to the fact that they were pioneers; those who follow them cannot be expected to achieve a similar greatness, and therefore we must be prepared to find in the prophets we are now to study not only less originality, but also less force. They both stand on a slightly lower level both of thought and power than their predecessors, and yet each, while resting on the past, manages to contribute something important to the development of prophecy; and taken together they contain a finely balanced message; the one is a peasant, more concerned for the condition of the countryside, and the other,

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probably a grandson of Hezekiah, more concerned for the condition of city life.

### MICAH

The Book of Micah is a smaller work than that of either Amos or Hosea ; it obviously owes much to those great pioneers of prophecy, the character of the man is on a simpler scale and his message runs on more subdued lines ; there is neither the strength of denunciation which rings in Amos, nor the passionate love which tears the heart of Hosea. Micah also suffers somewhat from contrast with his great contemporary, the princely Isaiah of Jerusalem, to whom he is perhaps indebted for some of his more striking ideas and of whom in some sense he is often an echo. And yet this comparison only seems to bring out his own distinctive mind and inherent greatness of soul. In his nature we have something of a combination of the character of Amos and Hosea, the very fact that they are harmonised compelling the word that runs so mightily in them to assume a quieter expression, and yet the combination being in itself an even more wonderful achievement. And while Isaiah towers above his

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peasant colleague in historical influence, in the grandeur of his style and the majesty with which he portrays his vision, Micah is not without original thoughts, comprehensive interest and even clearer vision on specific points, even though everything is planned on a somewhat smaller scale. It is always one of the signs of a really great mind that it is able to pour itself forth in considerable volume, but it is a sign of creative genius and original conception to be able to give utterance to ideas, even though they are only in hints and suggestions which inspire others to work them out and elaborate them into a system. It may be that this tiny collection is after all only notes or reminiscences of speeches, but even so, they anticipate and embody ideas which were to prompt great developments in the prophetic message ; and it is certainly a great accomplishment to be able to state some mighty theme in a succinct form which can be easily remembered and provides a continual spur to reflection. The mind of Micah moves more calmly than the intensely disturbed spirit of Hosea, and, therefore, we get in him not simply alternations of warning and promise, but a clear discerned succession in the settled belief that the

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time of tribulation will be succeeded by a time of restoration. He has a clearer idea of the operation of the divine forgiveness, which is not due to a mere alteration of feeling, but is a rational attitude, neither blasting the sinner to inevitable doom nor carelessly overlooking sin, but a determinate will to get rid of sin both in fact and effect. Although the country environment and provincial outlook deprive Micah of the inspiration of the city's stir and the excitement of great policy, yet his political judgments are no less sure than Isaiah's, and on some points he seems to have seen farther into the future, for, if the critics will let us retain some important passages, he must have foreseen not only the invasion of Israel by Assyria, but the exile of Judah to Babylon, and not only the exile, but the return, thus anticipating the expectation by which Jeremiah saved himself from complete despair. While Isaiah was concerned for Jerusalem and predicted its protection even when threatened by Sennacherib, Micah was not only as much concerned for the town and villages of the Shephelah, which would be involved in the catastrophe, but he foresaw that the attack upon Jerusalem would be launched from that quarter.

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Moreover, he predicted that Jerusalem would eventually not escape, but be ploughed as a heap, a prediction which made such an impression that it was recalled and quoted when Jeremiah's life was threatened for making a similar forecast (Jer. xxvi. 18).

It is a temptation to think, as some critics have pleaded, that Micah's wonderful picture of the warless world is the original of a similar passage found almost word for word in the second chapter of Isaiah, and that the prophecy for the coming of the Messianic deliverer from Bethlehem was conceived first by him and only elaborated by Isaiah into the majestic portraits of the Messiah's career and character for which he is rightly so famous; but there is no need to plead originality for our prophet at every point, and to regard Micah's Messianic prophecy as dependent upon Isaiah's great predictions only brings out a correction in the direction of lowliness which was most strikingly fulfilled in Jesus Himself. Moreover, on critical grounds it looks as if we must somewhat disregard the title page of the book, and place Micah only in the reigns of Hezekiah and his immediate successors, and thus make him slightly Isaiah's junior. This does nothing to detract

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from his greatness, especially if we remember that Micah was probably a person of common origin and a provincial, while Isaiah moved among courts and directed his country's foreign policy. His style, although wanting in the sustained power of Isaiah's, can achieve a perfection of simplicity, as when it defines the whole duty of man as dealing justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God ; it can attain to a fine poetic rhythm when it denounces rapacity : " they covet fields and seize them ; and houses, and take them away : and they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage " ; his peroration is as beautiful in its lyrical quality as it is profound in its theological insight :

Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage ? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again and have compassion upon us ; He will tread our iniquities under foot : and Thou will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea (vii. 18, 19).

In addition, we detect in him that use of physical imagery, due to the belief that nature is sympathetic to the divine purpose, which is the forerunner of later apocalyptic :

The Lord cometh forth out of His place, and will come down,

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and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under Him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, as waters that are poured down a steep place (i. 3, 4).

Altogether we have in this tiny work a marvellous combination of fruitful ideas and telling expression.

In the social teaching of Micah, and the place he gives to it, we are carried back to the outlook of Amos ; and although we miss something of that prophet's power of denunciation, the more dispassionate mind which Micah seems to bring to the situation enables him to give a more careful and detailed analysis of social conditions, in which he shows what a keen eye he has for injustice and how he discerns the fatal economic tendencies of his time. He calls attention to the gradual growth of a system of capitalism which is undermining the old conditions of security of tenure and involving the peasant population in debt and helotry. Men in the city are using their leisure to plot oppression, fraud, and violence ; and so far has this aggression upon the rights of the common people advanced that not only are their very garments being taken from them in pledge, but they are so ground down by poverty and need, that it is as if men were plucking the skin from their bones and



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chopping up their flesh for the stew-pot. Men are being squeezed of their very life, and an economic system is coming into operation that is little better than cannibalism, for many are full only because they are feeding on others. It would seem as if the city was flourishing on these social conditions, for he declares that "they build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity." This does not necessarily refer to the horrible heathen custom, by which bodies were buried under the foundation stone, and human sacrifices were used to consecrate a building; but in effect something similar was actually going on, for the glorification of the city was only being accomplished by the degradation and sacrifice of the peasantry. The general moral situation shared in this infection of iniquity: a system of bribery corrupted the judges and the official religious leaders, everyone was in reckless pursuit of money; commerce was becoming corrupt and fraudulent, and the unjust balance was everywhere in use; the rich were having recourse to violent methods, people in high places openly professing the mischief they were planning; the common people had forgotten how to speak the truth, friendship and family loyalty were

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undermined, and the godly seemed to have perished out of the earth ; everyone was either preying or being preyed upon ; human society was degenerating to the ethical level of the jungle.

Micah makes this indictment in a series of poetic denunciations which remind us of passages only too frequent in all the prophets. Unfortunately we can explain these similarities without supposing they are due to literary borrowing ; the same evils consistently re-appear throughout all ages where the economic system is allowed to develop without check or guidance by religious principles. There was a religion in existence, but it was corrupt and licentious ; the evils of idolatry are now clearly discerned, and the degrading licentious rites connected with the old Canaanitish worship are seen to be a source of far-spreading pollution. Micah believes that not only must the graven images be got rid of ; the obelisks and the sacred groves must also be rooted up ; these external observances were too much bound up with the old heathen notions, and there must be a puritanic reformation. In that he would apparently include the abolition of the whole sacrificial system. The contrast he makes between

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the efforts men make to worship God, and His actual requirements, are expressed in language that has become memorable :

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God ? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old ? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil ? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul ? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ? (vi. 6-8).

It is thus seen that Micah agrees with Amos : the abolition of ritual is, in his judgment, the only way to recover social and personal sincerity, which is the sole thing God requires of men. This raises once again the question, not yet settled even in Christendom, whether the use of external aids to worship inevitably leads to the neglect of character and conduct, even when these aids have been purged of superstitious and idolatrous significance, and the sacrifices are no longer sacrifices of blood, but only of the will, and simply expressed in prayer and thanksgiving. It may be that the prophets do not mean the antithesis to be pressed quite so violently as their words have been taken to indicate, and that they

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would not after all have welcomed the modern idea that religion should be nothing but an immanent direction of common life, having no symbolic expression whatsoever. It is very much to be questioned whether the neglect of external observances, as they have been practised in historic Christianity, would lead to an increased obedience to the three great requirements which Micah says are alone necessary: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

The masses of the people are largely ceasing to worship, but they are certainly not yet learning social justice, personal kindness or humble communion. These wonderful words of Micah's labour under the distinct disadvantage that they are expressed so simply and can be quoted so easily, for men fall into the mistake of thinking that they are just as simple and easy to perform. We know now that the attempt to frame a just order of society is the most tremendous task to which man can ever address himself, apparently needing more intellectual power and more administrative capacity than all the philosophical speculation and governmental ability that the world has ever yet produced, or even shown promise of doing. Similarly, it is widely held

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and frequently declaimed, that all that men require for practical guidance in personal conduct, in contradistinction to the complicated creeds of Christendom, is to be kind to one another :

So many Gods, so many creeds ;  
So many paths that wind and wind,  
While just the art of being kind  
Is all the sad world needs.

The truth is, that to be constantly and indiscriminately kind needs a positive education of spirit and a persistence of purpose which really involve an enormous dogmatic faith, not to say the help of positively supernatural grace. When we get away from the mere sentimental appeal of the words and the satisfaction that comes from relieving our souls by affirming our faith in kindness, and settle down to the actual business of being kind always and to everyone, we soon find that, unless we have some profound theology which tells us we are all of one " kind " ; unless we have a profound belief that mean, small, and evil men have a nature, however latent and buried in them, which will respond to the friendly approaches of their fellows, as well as some knowledge of a power that can restore that nature to supremacy ; and unless we have a final faith in the nature of

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God as love, and moreover that it is a nature which seeks to be incarnated in our own ; the task which seems so easy to talk about becomes impossible to practise and sustain. To walk humbly with God is an achievement which is only possible for us when the last strain of pride has been purged out of our souls, and we have learned by the furthest education of our spirits and the fine adjustment of every faculty, to understand and respond to the will of God ; which all demands a devotional life seriously and scientifically planned. Many who propose these simpler ways of religion are, as a matter of fact, not walking at all humbly with God, but only carelessly ; and carelessly, because proud of their unexamined and really fallacious integrity. The solution to the problem is probably not in any " either . . . or " method, but in the framing of religious observances so that they shall inspire, educate and sustain this only satisfactory and God-pleasing religion of social justice, personal kindness and humble communion. We must not be misled by this simple syllabus of God's requirements : it involves a total change in our social structure, personal character and religious consciousness.

But we need not think that the prophet was

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unaware of the implication of the substitute proposed. We can get some confirmation of this if we go back to his words a little before this wonderful passage, to where he speaks of God as saying: "O My people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against Me," and then goes on to speak of His providential care for the nation in the deliverance from Egypt and the sending of their great religious leaders. If God's requirements at last seem simple to man, they have only been made known to him through the perpetual inspiration, and even the passion, of the divine Spirit. It is no accident that these words are found in that very ancient devotion of the Church, "The Reproaches" used on Good Friday. Behind all our religion, even though the ordinary man is unconscious of it, there must be the unceasing travail of the divine heart. It is the knowledge of this that makes us humble, and the recognition of what still has to be accomplished that keeps us near to God, ever hearkening to His word, watching His way and seeking to work His will.

We have to be similarly on our guard, though our eyes are now more open, against the danger of taking the prophet too simply when we come to



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consider the famous passage in which he pictures the establishment of a warless world :

But in the latter days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills ; and peoples shall flow unto it. And many nations shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob ; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths : for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge between many peoples, and shall reprove strong nations afar off ; and they shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks : nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (iv. 1-3).

As we have already noted, this passage already exists in the second chapter of Isaiah, and it is still a matter of dispute which is the original, or whether both prophets have borrowed from elsewhere. Anyhow, it falls to be noticed as occurring here. After the world experience of the last decade, these words will be read without the superficial acceptance which has so often been accorded them. We seem farther off than ever from their fulfilment, or the finding of any guarantee that nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any

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more. For the Great War that has deluged Europe with blood and involved half the civilised world in the contest has done nothing to destroy the menace of militarism. The belief in the end of war had become one of the dogmas of idealists and humanitarians; strangely enough it was often only the religious people who seemed to be doubtful of its fulfilment, and even now they will often be found in the ranks of the unpersuaded and suspicious who declare that war will continue until human nature is radically changed. These religious people are now seen to be right; save that neither do they seem to believe in the capacity of religion to change human nature.

It would be well to examine this passage a little more carefully, and see if the prophet is doing anything more than letting himself dream of an idyllic state of society, or whether he is also laying down principles which must be followed if it is ever to be attained. It is interesting to notice therefore that he predicts the supremacy of his own nation, although not in any militaristic or even governmental fashion, but simply that Jerusalem is to be exalted in the eyes of all mankind, because out of it has gone not only the prophetic word but instruction in the true law

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of life. This means that the prophet claims that in the divine revelation which has come to Israel, especially through the teaching of the prophets, the nations have had given to them indications of a way by which they may abandon their old divisions and give up recourse to armed decision. He seems definitely to foresee the application of the principle of arbitration: "He shall judge between great peoples, and decide concerning strong nations." This of course involves much more than the setting up in the world of a Court of Arbitration: it needs the acceptance among all people not only of definite principles of justice but also the utter rejection of the immoral principle of deciding issues by mortal combat; which demands a corresponding comprehension that the lifting up of the sword carries with it the abandonment of any efficient moral appeal. But it involves something even more than the common acceptance of these principles amongst all peoples, something more than a setting up of laws to which all can appeal; the prophet images God Himself as Arbitrator. Ultimately it will be found necessary to have not only principles and laws, but a great Arbitrator. The prophet must have imagined God Himself as in some way acting

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personally amongst men, and we can only conceive how that idea can be fulfilled, first, through the fact of the Incarnation and, secondly, through the Spirit-filled Church—a Church filled with the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might. We can be fairly sure that until there does emerge a Church entirely international and profoundly spiritual, with an authority men will admit and obey, there will be no power amongst us able to put an end to war. It may be also that the declaration that “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks” is more than poetic decoration or a mark of the prophet’s predilection for a pastoral life. This world has yet to learn that the issue is not far distant when it will be a choice between the sword and the plough. It does not mean of course that a pastoral society is necessarily a guarantee against war ; but when the instincts of men are aroused to recognise the world’s pressing need of productive labour, especially in order to secure to all the peoples of the earth even a modicum of necessary food, then they will understand that mankind simply cannot afford to go to war unless it can also afford to starve ; also that the tendency of civilisation to neglect

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the basic concern of agriculture, in order to enjoy the profits and luxuries which mass manufacture can produce, is slowly working out an industrialism whose destruction is, in more ways than one, inevitable.

It will take all man's manual and mental power to secure a growing world against famine and want. The very efforts after a high state of civilisation, which so often involve the exploitation of native labour and virgin areas, is one of the great causes of the menace of war ; and if mankind cannot move towards a co-operative system based, primarily, on agriculture, and world-wide in its organisation, it will always be involved in ever-growing wars, which, ultimately, are due to the fact that the great majority of people are trying to live as far as possible removed from the actual production of necessities and on the fruits of other people's labour. It is interesting to notice in confirmation of our taking seriously this reference to agriculture as the alternative to militarism, that even if Micah has borrowed this passage from Isaiah, he has added something to it: " they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree ; and none shall make them afraid " (iv. 4).

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While Isaiah is concerned with international policy and has the essentially civic outlook, Micah comes down in the end to the one thing he desires, namely, that men may be undisturbed at productive labour, with all fear of interference removed. It is an idyllic picture, and we seem to be moving ever farther away from it. The prophet himself seems to have realised that it was far off, for in the next verse, where he goes on to say, "for all the peoples will walk everyone in the name of his god," he realises that, at present, at any rate, people will follow their false gods, but he proposes that his own people shall "walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever." Even though the rest of the world is still unpersuaded, the people who believe in God must somehow covenant to begin a simple undefended life, but it must have both these characteristics: the nations cannot live on the present basis of civilisation and go unarmed; and if we are to get rid of militarism, we shall probably find that we have got to get rid of industrialism as well.

It is no wonder that, brooding on these subjects and thus envisaging the needs of humanity, this prophet, here unlike and in advance of his

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predecessors, comes to a clear conception of the Messianic Kingdom and its King :

But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel ; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth : then the residue of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand, and shall feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God (v. 2-4).

It seems impossible to reduce this vision, obscure in points as it may be, merely to the idea that it predicts the continuation of the Davidic line, or that one day Judah shall have a good king. Micah himself had lived under one of the best kings that ever sat on David's throne, the good Hezekiah, yet even during that reign he had foreseen that his reforms were inadequate, or he may have lived to see the swift and dreadful reaction under Manasseh. His words indicate that something very wonderful must happen to this people if it is to be saved, as a close examination of the following passage will show :

Now why dost thou cry out aloud ? Is there no king in thee, is thy counsellor perished, that pangs have taken hold of thee as of a woman in travail ? Be in pain, and labour to bring forth,



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O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail; for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and shalt dwell in the field, and shalt come even into Babylon; there shalt thou be rescued; there shall the Lord redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies (iv. 9-10).

This seems to indicate that the nation must bring forth some greater personality, but, unlike Isaiah, on whose great idea of Immanuel he may be dependent, Micah does not believe that this will take place until the nation has gone into exile and in captivity has learned its lesson and the only way of redemption.

But it is in the passage previously quoted that he indicates more closely his expectation of a ruler of Israel, "whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting." There is a mysteriousness about these words, as there is also about Isaiah's references to Immanuel, which make it very difficult to conceive that Micah had nothing more in mind than that the king was to be of the anciently founded dynasty of David. Such words seem an unnecessary exaggeration to describe merely that. It is perhaps open to conjecture that although he accepted Isaiah's expectation on this subject, Micah thought his princely colleague was too much influenced by

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courtly ideas and had an exaggerated estimate of the power of kingship and city government. If the great person must be of the root of Jesse, it would be well to remember that originally that dynasty sprang from the lowliest circumstances ; it sprang from the city of Bethlehem, one of the smallest of the families of Judah, and David had first been trained in the humble calling of a shepherd. He may have meant no more than that the redeemer of Israel must have a similar upbringing, and the fact that Christ was born at Bethlehem may appear to the modern mind no more than a happy coincidence. However that may be, it is no coincidence that He was born in obscurity and trained in lowliness, and had worked as a craftsman at His trade ; for Christ's stooping to servitude was part of an eternal choice. Micah clearly implies that the redeemer is to have the instincts not of a monarch, but of a shepherd ; He must care for the common people. It is no accident that our Lord more than once referred to the discharge of His own Messianic mission as like the function of a good shepherd. He certainly cared for men's souls as a shepherd cares for his sheep, and He did come to seek and save that which was lost. And for one fine line of this

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prophecy Micah is by no means dependent upon Isaiah of Jerusalem : instead we may discover in it the original suggestion for the idea worked out so gloriously in the second half of Isaiah, attributed by nearly all critics to post-exilic times :

Behold, the Lord God will come as a mighty one, and His arm shall rule for Him ; behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him.

He shall feed His flock like a shepherd, and shall carry them in His bosom (Is. xl. 10, 11).

Our prophet has the same combination of lowliness and majesty : “ He shall feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.” And it is precisely this which our Lord fulfils in His ever wonderful combination of humility and moral majesty, far outpassing all trappings of earthly monarchy and the pompous pretensions of the world’s great ones.

After this passage his vision seems to fall into obscurity, for although he goes on to declare that “ this man shall be our peace : when the Assyrian shall come into our land,” he seems unable to conceive that peace will be secured save by Israel wasting Assyria with the sword. This seems to correspond with other words of his, where he calls upon the daughter of Zion

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to "arise and thresh . . . for thou shalt beat in pieces many peoples: and thou shalt devote their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth." This seems entirely to contradict his great vision of the warless world, but we can frequently find such contradictions in the prophets, and it is difficult to discover a principle of reconciliation if we are not to have continual recourse to the theory of later interpolation. Otherwise we might have to think of the divine inspiration lifting the mind of the prophet up above its ordinary range, and its sinking back again to levels of national expectation. There can be no doubt however which is the higher vision and which is marked, even in its literary form, by the more certain inspiration.

Micah's message, however calmly it may have been delivered, inevitably involved him in controversy, and he seems to have come in contact with what was a growing opposition against the new prophecy, namely, the organised bodies of seers which resented both the message and the office of the new type of prophet. Amos had disavowed his origin from such sources; but now there seems to be a developing hostility between the

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two forces, which was to come to a crisis in the time of Jeremiah. Micah is one of the first to brand the old movement as a false prophecy; he has an oracle concerning the prophets that "make my people to err." His complaint is that they make a living of their profession, and that they are prepared to prophesy peace if they get well supported, and if not, to prophesy destruction. Apparently they had replied sarcastically, calling upon these new prophets to desist from their perpetual dropping of weary reproaches, and Micah concludes from the support that they could rally, that the people seemed to prefer those who prophesied to them "in wind and falsehood, of wine and strong drink." They only wanted empty rhetoric, which would promise them a good time and confirm them in their intoxicated hopes. The people want to be drugged either with wine or with empty words; they will not face facts. Apparently, through this opposition, Micah is driven not so much to affirm the certainty of his calling, as Amos was, but rather back upon his personal religion, and there, as in other points, he anticipates the emergence of a character like that of Jeremiah. This seems to be the natural meaning of the words :

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But as for me, I will look unto the Lord ; I will wait for the God of my salvation : my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy ; when I fall, I shall arise ; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him ; until He plead my cause, and execute judgment for me : He will bring me forth to light, and I shall behold His righteousness (vii. 7-10).

The prophet does not tell us in what issue he regards himself as having sinned, but there is here that true note of humility, which he has commended as one of God's great requirements, as well as the note of certainty that he will be vindicated by the events of history. But there is something more than that : there is that definite drawing nearer to God, through personal communion, which begins to create a new element in Israel's religion and which through Jeremiah and the Psalmists has made such a valuable contribution to the thought of mankind. This personal religion is often found through external misfortune, and especially through rejection. Unfortunately it does not always make the rejected prophet walk humbly with his God ; in modern times he is more inclined to rejoice in his rejection and pride himself in his isolation ; and that means that he advances to no more intimate

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religion, and so is unable to turn back and pour again his personal experience into his prophecy, and to elevate the social consciousness he would create with a new discovery of God. It is not until we come down perhaps to New Testament times, that the discovery is wholly made that the intimate personal experience of religion has come to men not as a consolation for social rejection, but as a commission to make intimate communion the standard of a new order of society. It is not a question of "personal religion *versus* a just social order," but the combination of them which holds the real hope of the future, and if Micah has not clearly and entirely seen that, he has certainly moved towards it.

There is little doubt that it was his personal experience of forgiveness, whatever the issue may have been for which he blames himself as guilty, which led him on to such a profound belief in the pardoning God. This is at work all through his prophecy, enabling him to believe not only that God will restore Israel, but that the experiences of the exile will be the instruments of Israel's redemption, because they will beget a deeper understanding of God's law and way, and beget a conviction that He does pardon the

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sins of His people when they turn to Him and repent. In the passage already referred to, which brings his work to a close, he outlines in a beautiful lyric his belief in the uniqueness of Israel's God because of His forgiving nature.

Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage ? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again and have compassion upon us ; He will tread our iniquities under foot : and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea (vii. 18, 19).

Here, surely, Micah is tracking towards a true monotheism, which makes the God of Israel superior to all the idols of man's imagination, not only because He is stronger and holier, but because He is not a mere law of retribution working in history, but is a *personal* God, who remains still the loving Father, even when He can only teach His children by stern discipline, suffering and sorrow. Perhaps Micah has not quite been able to rise to a statement of the principle by which God can pardon ; for he seems only to regard forgiveness as an overlooking of sin and the passing by of transgression, an unwillingness to retain anger for ever, simply because He loves to be kind. But perhaps in the very closing words,



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“Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea,” he sees that mere compassion for man’s erring heart and the mere desire to show mercy is not sufficient. Something has got to take place which will overcome all the effects of iniquity: somehow men’s sins must be overwhelmed in the depths of the sea. He could not see that the ocean of God’s love would have to be stained with His own blood, before He could wash away the sins of the world and make men’s offence as if it had never been. But both in his Messianic expectation and his conception of a pardoning God, he is held by a vision which, if he cannot always discern its outlines clearly, is never fulfilled until at last Christ appears and sets forth through His Cross a fountain for the cleansing of the world.

### ZEPHANIAH

The Book of Zephaniah was written about a century after the prophecy of Micah. Although there is very little definitely to mark its date, there are two considerations that help us to fix its chronology. Apart from its heading, which tells us that it was written in the reign of

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Josiah, which need not be disputed, there are only two circumstances which enable us more closely to determine its chronological position. The first of these is the state of idolatry and religious corruption in Jerusalem, from which we infer that he is describing a period previous to the great reformation begun by Josiah in 620. It may be that the prophet's work had considerable influence in helping forward that reformation, and therefore it would appear to be quite safe to date his prophecy about five years before that historic movement, which very largely purged Judah of idolatrous worship. The second historical reference which indicates the period is the threat of impending disaster, and scholars believe this refers to the invasion of the Scythians, nomadic hordes noted for their ruthless cruelty, who were at this time sweeping all over Western Asia. There is nothing in the book itself which necessarily identifies the expected judgment with this dreadful scourge, save that the reference to its falling upon the surrounding nations (the Philistines, the Moabites and the Ammonites) seems to fit in with what we know of the Scythian invasion, which was held up by Psammeticus I of Egypt as they were advancing towards his

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country by way of the maritime plain. But we have no record that the Scythians invested or seriously threatened Jerusalem, and there seems no absolute necessity to think that Zephaniah had anything particular in his mind. His belief in the coming judgment was perhaps not so much due to rumours of their invasion or the emergence of any military menace, but to his conviction that the corruption of society had gone so far that some fearful judgment of God was to be expected.

If the Hezekiah named in the title is to be identified with the king, as is probable, then Zephaniah belonged to the royal house, and that would offer every opportunity for observing the life of the court and city. He is familiar with every inch of Jerusalem, and not only refers to its different quarters, but he is also entirely aware of the sort of life that was being lived by the inhabitants. He gives us a clear-cut picture of the religious and social degradation of the city life: Baal is being worshipped in the holy city; idolatrous rites had their priests resident in the city, who are called Chemarim (perhaps because of their black robes which they were not ashamed to wear, or because of the dark worship they celebrated); the common people could often be

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seen worshipping the stars on the flat roofs of the city. In addition to this, violence and deceit were openly practised by the retainers of the court, while the rulers and judges behaved more like wild beasts, devouring the people till not a bone remained. Professional prophets were not only utterly superficial, unwilling to rebuke moral corruption, or discern the judgment that was coming, but they were no longer loyal to the historic faith, nor were even the priests of the temple free from the suspicion of sacrilege. What specially aroused the apprehension of the prophet was the pride and complacency of the people; the empty boasting and offensive haughtiness of the inhabitants filled him with alarm; he knew that "pride goeth before a fall," not only because such an attitude is an offence to God, but it is always such an offence to other men that it provokes hatred and stirs up vengeance. These are conditions that God cannot tolerate, and the prophet believes that an overwhelming judgment must soon fall upon the whole land. But the description of the judgment is so sweeping and final that it is difficult to see how an invasion of nomads or indeed any military menace could quite fulfil the prophet's vision. He believes

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“ that the day of the Lord is at hand ” ; and it is no accident that the Vulgate rendering of his words, “ that day is a day of wrath,” *dies irae, dies illa*, should have inspired Thomas Celano with his awful hymn of the Last Day; for there is something in Zephaniah’s picture of the coming catastrophe which has about it all the feeling and finality of God’s last judgment upon the world.

That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high battlements (i. 15, 16).

The description of this Day seems not only to involve an almost unheard of destruction of humanity, when blood shall be poured out like dust and the flesh of men shall rot and become as refuse on the land, but the prophet certainly seems to picture the complete collapse of nature and the end of the world. This vision has impressed the general imagination, but it is now often put aside as either so far off that it is no one’s concern, or, although an event which even the scientist may predict as hidden in Nature’s possibilities, as having no moral significance whatever, and therefore no longer forming any

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part of educated religious expectation. Certainly nothing like this was immediately fulfilled. Jerusalem was not destroyed by the Scythians, but only much later by the Chaldeans, and nothing that has ever happened to the world has perhaps quite reached to the level of the prophet's expectation. But no one who thinks far enough ahead, who has ever tried to calculate the possibilities of the tendency to moral corruption in humanity, and who believes in God's government of the world and His lordship over the natural universe, can quite shut out the possibility that to dissolve this world, even with the unimaginable catastrophe that would involve, might in the last resort be the most merciful thing that God could do ; while everything that science teaches only serves to remind us that the stability of the natural order is always hanging on a thread, and that one tremble in the ether or the slow decay of a single component element, and the whole visible order might collapse in a moment and disappear in the twinkling of an eye. The prophet believed that this judgment would fall upon all flesh, and he specially marks out the surrounding nations, even extending the area of his vision by singling out Egypt and Assyria. Of Nineveh in

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particular he predicts such a complete passing away of its civilisation that the site of the city will become the home of wild beasts, its ruins the nests of birds ; the place that was once the centre of joy and pride, where men consumed time in careless pleasure, will become nothing more than a few mounds and monuments in a wilderness, at which the traveller shall shake his head, wondering at the mutability of human greatness and worldly grandeur. Here and there we can detect something like a nationalistic rejoicing in the overthrow of Israel's historic enemies, as in the case of the Philistines, the Moabites and the Ammonites, whose land will be possessed by Israel ; and if any passages are to be suspected of being interpolations (and some scholars would eliminate quite a number in this already tiny book) it might perhaps be these, as they seem inconsistent with the general spirit of the prophet. Although he has a vision of such a judgment as will make a complete end of man, he has also a vision of restoration ; and these must be alternatives rather than subsequent epochs, if we are to credit his thinking with any consistency ; for he believes that repentance can postpone or turn aside the judgment of God ; if even only the meek

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of the earth will seek social justice and practise humility, they will be left untouched, though the fury of God's jealousy rage through the rest of the world. Here again is a thought which was to have great influence upon religious imagination, namely that in the great catastrophe of the Last Day some would find salvation by being hid in the day of the Lord's anger ; and although we can no longer even indulge our imagination as to what such an event must mean, it must always remain a conviction of devout thought that the history of this world is working out to an event which will discriminate with absolute exactness between the good and the evil.

The prophet evidently has great hopes for the future of the world, if only the proud are destroyed and there are left in it the meek, the poor and the pious. This is obviously his guarantee against the perpetual rise and fall which history so far portrays : there shall come a time when men shall cease to blind their judgments and raise hatred against themselves by national boasting and callous pride, and the land shall be possessed by those who are content with a quiet life, honest industry to secure common necessities, and the practice of intimate religion. It is a somewhat



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reduced view of human life, after all the majesty and movement of history, and holds little attraction for those who are never content unless they have piled up riches, built amazing cities, and brought the mass of mankind into servile subjection. But since all such developments of civilisation carry within themselves the seeds of decay or the vengeance of revolution, it is perhaps time that men began to consider the prophet's alternative of a quiet life based upon an equitable distribution of only such material things as are really necessary; while the main purpose of life becomes the cultivation of the soul, and its greatest riches the treasures of the mind and the conquest of the spirit. This need not be either a monotonous or a tame existence, but might be brimming with happiness and offer room for an infinite adventure and expansion of the spirit of man. It is such a picture of the city with which the prophet leaves us: of a community so pleasing to God that He rejoices in the contemplation of man; instead of the thunder of His judgments or even the need for further mighty revelations of His mind, there will be such an understanding between man and God that He can rest in His love, since at last it has triumphed and He is satisfied of the travail

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of His soul ; He need never more use the harsh word of denunciation, there need only be the song of the Eternal Heart expressing itself in the music of the spheres. It is a picture of calm and placid beauty which only a spiritual experience can understand or appreciate ; the perfection of contemplative religion, where man looks at God, and God looks at man, and communion between them is expressed in the mystic language of music. We are therefore brought in sight of the eternal joy which belongs to the very nature of God, which according to the soaring speculation of the theologians, arises from the ceaseless pulsations of love between the Persons who constitute the internal life of Deity. Into this life it is the divine purpose to exalt redeemed humanity, enriching its happiness with such measure as only the raptures of music can convey to our mortal mind. Not only will the redeemed sing their new and immortal song, God Himself will rejoice with singing over humanity for ever united to Him in the Person of His Son.

The work of this prophet is not only very slight in quantity, but both his style and his ideas have a somewhat similar character of lightness. Even his denunciations tend to run into the form of

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pleasant little lyrics, and few of his words could be described as arresting the mind by their force, or leaving a permanent impression upon the memory. It is like a gentle song which is pleasant enough while it lasts, but can hardly be recalled afterwards. It is obvious that the message and style which thunder in Amos, sob in Hosea, and resound with such majesty of form in Isaiah, are now losing their power. It has all been said as adequately as it ever can be. Zephaniah becomes something of an echo and one that is growing fainter. And yet the book also marks the beginning of something new; the prophet is a singer more than a declaimer, and in his last lyric of the happy city we hear him trying over, somewhat timidly, an air which is to be woven into the glorious oratorios of the Second Isaiah :

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem (iii. 14).

But he has not yet found the vision great enough for his song; he has the music; he has not yet found his theme, and the prophetic word has to move forward to a vaster conception of redemption before it can rise again to its ancient majesty, and, as in the Second Isaiah, even surpass it.

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For such a theme Zephaniah's vision of judgment is unsuitable, and so, while he finds he can say no more on this line than has already been said, and, therefore, cannot say it with such power or force, he tries over a few notes on a happier theme, and although the melody seems little more than placid and plaintive, like the first notes with which some bird will announce the coming dawn, it was to form the basis of glorious anthems which, gathering chorus from the myriad voices of mankind, and enriched with the mighty chords of history, were to break out at last into the infinite and inexhaustible song of the redeemed.

## CHAPTER IV

### Nahum, Habakkuk and Jonah

It will provide an instructive contrast in the varying prophetic attitude toward the problem of retribution, if we group together the three prophets, Nahum, Habakkuk and Jonah for our consideration. Nahum and Habakkuk actually come close together; Nahum being written somewhere between 663, which is the date of the fall of Thebes, and 607, the date of the destruction of Nineveh; and much nearer to the latter than the former; while the date of Habakkuk must fall only a few years later, probably about the year 600. Although Jonah comes so much later in history, probably about the year 300, the book refers back to a time actually before Nahum, and when Nineveh was still standing. But the grouping together helps to throw light upon an ever recurring problem of history, namely, how mankind is to deal with the rise of a tyrant and a threatening power. The three prophets represent

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three attitudes : Nahum is content simply to rejoice in the overthrow of the tyrant ; Habakkuk voices the difficulty that the overthrow of the tyrant is generally accomplished by some power which becomes as great a tyrant in its place ; Jonah sees that the only possible solution is the conversion of the tyrant. If this threefold attempt to solve the problem is kept in mind, we shall find that we are reading these three prophecies with a greater interest, and that we are gaining light upon a problem that still perplexes humanity.

It would be helpful at this point to have roughly in mind the movements of the great powers surrounding the Jewish people. The great power of Egypt in the south seems to have been content to remain in its own borders unless threatened by aggression ; but it was different with the great power of Assyria in the north-east, which towards the end of the eighth century began to menace the freedom of Israel. Samaria had actually fallen to Sargon in 722, and very soon afterwards Hezekiah was paying tribute to the same power. Against this Hezekiah eventually revolted, with the result that Sennacherib invaded Judah, captured forty-six of its cities and at length appeared with his impudent demand for surrender

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at the gates of Jerusalem. Isaiah tells the story of how the city was saved by the intervention of God; it is supposed that some pestilence attacked the Assyrian forces and compelled them to raise the siege and march away. But Assyria had designs upon Egypt, and indeed was determined to conquer the world. After the invasion and subjection of Egypt by Esarhaddon, there was a revolt, and a punitive expedition was led by Asshurbanipal, in which the mighty and sacred city of No-Ammon, better known as Thebes, was plundered and destroyed. Asshurbanipal seems to have laid the whole of the western lands under tribute, as well as invading Persia and destroying Susa. There seems to have been no purpose in this great scheme of conquest, beyond the mere lust of power. The Assyrians were a savage and barbaric people, with a low moral standard, desirous only of establishing their supremacy at the cost of subject nations, and living in vulgar luxury on the tribute that they were able to exact. Their methods of making war were utterly savage: despoiling cities of their treasures, putting the inhabitants, and even the children, to the sword, and carrying away captive their kings and leaders, whom they



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rejoiced in treating with insult and shame. But the ascendancy of Assyria was short-lived.

Nineveh had been threatened in the year 624 by the Medes under King Cyaxares, but he had been compelled to retreat because of his own country being invaded by the Scythians. The reckoning came at last at the hand of Babylon, which had been a dependent city of Assyria, who appointed its ruler. A revolt had, however, taken place, and when the king of Nineveh endeavoured to bring Babylon to terms, Nabopolassar, Nineveh's viceroy in Babylon, called to his aid the king of the Umman-manda, or northern hordes, who probably included the Medes, and laid siege to Nineveh, absolutely destroying it in the year 607.

It is somewhere into this period of history, which marks the rise of Babylon as the successor of Nineveh's hegemony, that the prophets we are now to study have to be fitted. Something of their anger at Assyria and their despair concerning the movements of the world powers which surrounded them may be understood, when it is remembered not only that one tyrannical power succeeded another, and, despite the hopes raised when one after another collapsed, Judah was never free from the menace of their invasion or

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the imposition of their tyranny ; but in the conflicts which took place first between Assyria and Egypt, and then between Babylon and Egypt, since the land of Palestine lay between them, it suffered perpetually from the troops of these implacable powers, who had to cross its territory to reach their enemies. Palestine was thus the Belgium of the ancient world.

### NAHUM

The prophecy of Nahum has a welcome clearness ; there are few obscurities in its references ; it is obvious that it has hopes of the final destruction of Nineveh, and the prophet is content to picture its overthrow and to rejoice in it as a manifestation of the justice of God. There are a few undetermined points, which arise from the fact that Nahum apparently knew more about Nineveh than we do, and there is a tradition, though not an ancient one, that he belonged to Alkush, which is near Nineveh, and where his tomb is pointed out, and therefore doubtless belonged to the tribes transported thither at the fall of Samaria ; so that he may have known Nineveh with fair intimacy and may have

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felt all the natural indignation of a captive exile suffering directly at the hands of the oppressor. It may be, however, that his Elkosh is to be identified with some place in the land of Palestine (a village in Galilee and another in Judah have been traditionally identified with it), so that then we should have to regard Nahum's description of Nineveh as due to hearsay ; if so, then his picture of the final siege is due either to a most vivid imagination, or to a prophetic vision, in which the whole thing was clearly seen. What can be gathered from his description is that the country around Nineveh had already been invaded by the enemy, that the siege of the city was imminent and preparations for its defence were being hastily made ; and if his prophecy actually came true, and the siege ended in the overthrow and destruction of Nineveh, then we can place this prophecy actually in the year 607. But the language of the prophecy is really inconsistent with any particular moment, because at one time we hear of the inhabitants being called upon to strengthen the defences by erecting new outworks, and at another the fortresses are falling into the hands of the besiegers like the first ripe figs shaken off the tree ; again, we see the defenders

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being rushed hastily and in confusion to some point where the mantelet (a sort of movable fort, by which the besiegers could work the battering-ram under cover) is making a dangerous breach in the wall; then the city seems to be already filled with the invading foe, and in every direction the corpses of the slain are lying heaped together; and finally we see Huzzab (which is probably the name for the queen) carried with her mourning handmaids into captivity. But the prophet certainly sees various successive incidents of a destructive siege, and one which is to bring Nineveh to an absolute end. It is to be such a stroke as will need no second blow; such an end to its people that not only shall its menace to the other nations be broken, and neither its cruel armies nor insolent ambassadors be seen again in the land, but the inhabitants shall be so scattered and the city so utterly destroyed, that there shall be no descendant left, and hardly a trace of its ancient glories be discoverable.

It is this complete fading away of Nineveh with all its splendour and might which is the astonishing fact the prophet predicts. He speaks of Nineveh as drained away like a pool when its dam is broken; although her merchants have

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been as countless as the stars, and her marshals have settled down on the land like a swarm of grasshoppers, camping in the hedges in multitudes as is their habit, yet like them, when the sunshine comes, they have quickly and mysteriously disappeared. Upon all this mighty pride and military enterprise there falls the slumber of death ; recovery is impossible ; Nineveh will never rise again, and there is no one to bemoan her fall, no one who will have a word of comfort for her scattered captives, for all who hear the report will only clap their hands for joy because the hated tyrant is no more. Nahum does not even spend time analysing the causes of this astonishing overthrow ; he does not paint with any detail the horror of Assyrian warfare, the iniquity of her oppressors, or the sin on which she has spent her spoils ; save that he mentions the ruthlessness with which Thebes had been destroyed by her hand, when her people were taken captive, her great men bound in chains, and her young children dashed in pieces ; or, when he compares Nineveh to a den of lions, where the old lion walked with his mate and brought thither the strangled carcase, tearing it in pieces for his young, and filling the cave with his prey, no one

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daring to resist or put an end to the constant robbery and slaughter. No doubt this is an accurate description, not only of Assyria, but of many of these barbaric powers ; they behave like wild beasts whose life can only be supported by cruel assault upon other nations and the tearing of their people to pieces. He refers also to the whoredoms and witchcrafts of Nineveh ; but this perhaps does not refer to the sensuality of the city, but to her dealings with other nations, which were nothing but blandishments in order to secure a hold upon them, or deceitful alliances planned only for her own advantage and enrichment. But the fierce joy in the city's destruction, which the prophet himself shares and cannot conceal, is a sufficient indication of the hatred Nineveh had aroused and of the misery she had spread throughout the world. The indignation which here breaks forth had been long pent up, and represents years of intolerable suffering and insult ; the destruction of the city marks only the well-earned retribution of justice, and is received everywhere with expressions of relief and satisfaction. There is something human and natural in all this, and the slightest acquaintance with the history of the world or even some experience of what

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tyranny can yet perpetrate begets sufficient sympathy for an understanding and appreciation of this book ; and Nahum is certain that in such an overthrow we see the action of God's vengeance and the vindication of His justice.

In the first chapter of his book the prophet gives us the only indication of his religious outlook, and he is content, in the presence of this impressive event, to think of God almost solely as the instrument of avenging wrath. He finds support for this in nature's display of destructive power in the whirlwind and the storm, where, in a fine image, he regards the gathering clouds in the heavens as the dust raised by the advancing feet of God, and he looks upon the storm which shakes the mountains and blast the forests with lightning, setting on fire the thorns and thickets on the hills, while the floods sweep down their sides carrying destruction before them, as a veritable theophany ; he sees in the overthrow of Nineveh a similar manifestation of the power of God. He believes this power is discriminating ; it is not easily roused ; it is slow to anger, but soon or late sin will be punished, and although God shows Himself thus dreadful to His enemies, to those who put their trust in Him He is nothing



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but beneficence ; they shall find Him a stronghold when all others are in trouble. Now it is certain that there is some retributory power at work in history, for nothing is more constant and sure than that tyranny at length breeds revolt, and injustice sharpens vengeance against itself. There is something in man that the oppressor needs to be afraid of, for anger, however slowly it gathers, is a terrible force and will not only raise up resistance, but will exact an awful retribution. And yet we are compelled to believe that while God uses human vengeance to execute deserved retribution, this does not reveal all His mind, nor satisfy His ultimate purpose. There is no recognition in our prophet that vengeance often goes too far, his view of history is not wide enough to discern that all these repetitions of retribution do nothing to prevent further experiments in oppression. He has not yet reached the vision of the poet Blake, which is only too true a comment upon historical vengeance :

The hand of vengeance sought the bed  
To which the purple tyrant fled ;  
The iron hand crushed the tyrant's head,  
And became a tyrant in his stead.

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Our prophet is unable to discern the moral necessity by which the avenger is almost certain to suffer deterioration in the very act of carrying out retributive justice, and, although in one beautiful verse he anticipates the evangelistic words of the Second Isaiah : " Behold, upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace," he probably only refers to the tidings that the aggressor is overthrown. A more discerning view of history shows, and the world is slowly learning, that the violent destruction of some military menace by a superior force of the same character, holds within itself no assurance of permanent peace. Since God allows man to take vengeance, and has sown so deeply in his heart the resentment that prepares it, we must believe that God uses this method of retribution ; and yet when we see how on the whole He is compelled to use one evil power to destroy another, or that a good power becomes evil by the very methods of destruction it has to employ, so that when God raises up one nation to chastise another, He immediately has to destroy that nation in turn ; and when we consider the practical ineffectiveness of the whole method, we are bound to see in all

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this vicious circle of vengeance an inadequate expression of the divine will, and, in fact, only the first stages of a lesson by which God Himself is bringing humanity to a higher view of His will and to a true appreciation of the divine method. The prophets of Israel are only slowly led to this conception and never perhaps wholly reach it, but a step towards its understanding is taken by the doubts which are aroused in the mind of the prophet Habakkuk.

### HABAKKUK

Habakkuk can be dated somewhere about the year 600, because he speaks of the rise of the Chaldeans, who had manifested their power in arms not only by the destruction of Nineveh in 607, but by their defeat of Egypt at Carchemish in 605. But at the same time it must be admitted that there are difficulties in fixing the time of this prophecy with certainty, because, although it speaks of the Chaldeans being raised up as an instrument of judgment, he knows enough of their behaviour to complain that they are worse than those on whom they have executed vengeance. Various solutions of this difficulty have been

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proposed, though none have won universal acceptance. But the determination of this point need not detain us, for what is more important is for us to mark the rise of the doubt in the mind of Habakkuk concerning the working out of retributive vengeance, as well as the manifestation of a new characteristic in him, whereby the prophet is no longer overpowered by the word which he is to deliver to the people, but turns to question God as to the meaning of the word, even daring to take up an argument with the Lord as to the value of the revelation given to him. We have here a complaining and debating prophet, who does not simply listen to the word of God, but questions its efficacy, and we recognise at once an anticipation of Jeremiah and the rise of an interior criticism, which was not to lead to doubt whether God does really speak to man, but by its questioning was to enable him to interpret the divine word more certainly and with greater freedom from the misunderstandings of the subjective mind and the refractions of personal desire. The prophet complains that God sets him to observe nothing but violence and iniquity, whereas he himself holds that God is so infinitely pure that He cannot look upon evil ; it cannot be

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that the holy God sanctions unholy methods. Yet here in this world, judgment is never seen going forth to perfect victory; it is always perverted by the human instruments it employs. It seems that when Habakkuk had complained of the spoiling and violence, the strife and contention among his own people, then God had answered him by bidding him look round and observe the rise of the Chaldeans. But the trouble is that this nation soon shows itself to be far more wicked than those whom it punishes; not only is this nation terrible and dreadful, but the vengeance it exacts is motivated not by any moral discernment that it possesses, but only by its tremendous pride and belief in itself. Here is a nation which no doubt manifests the works of judgment, but it is not only a judgment which is bestial in its application, for it is like the attack of leopards and wolves; in avenging evil, it does worse evil. Moreover, this instrument used by God is one which does not acknowledge God at all; its might is its god: "he sacrificeth unto his net, and burneth incense unto his drag"; it is a power that worships its own military might. Therefore the answer that God had given the prophet by raising up the Chaldeans only brings a more

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difficult problem into view, and so the prophet sets himself to a still more earnest vigil ; he dares to question the ways of God ; he dares to criticise His methods, sure that God will not condemn his doubts, but give him some satisfactory answer. And this is the answer that comes to him, an answer that he is told to write and make so plain that it can be easily read, an answer nevertheless that will not yet be fully understood, for it will need the experience of history to discern its meaning. The message, to translate the words literally, runs : “ Behold his soul is puffed up, it is not even within him,<sup>1</sup> but the just shall live by his faithfulness.”

It is generally supposed that the first half of this statement refers to the Chaldeans ; they are elated with pride, with the result that uprightness and righteousness cannot be expected of them, but by keeping steady and faithful the just will be vindicated. As will be remembered, the New Testament has made great use of the second half of this revelation, and by translating it, “ the just shall live by faith,” has considerably altered the meaning of the Hebrew word, which is

<sup>1</sup> The text is probably corrupt ; Wellhausen would amend to read, “ as for the crooked man, his soul is not right within him.”

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undoubtedly "faithfulness" or "trustworthiness." And yet if we think the matter through, the New Testament has really made clear what must underlie the real value of Habakkuk's vision; the downfall of all such nations as the Chaldeans is their pride and their lack of faith; they do not discern the real meaning of history because they so exult in their own power; they are not open therefore to moral understanding, because they are not open to the true conception of God. The just man can see farther and, if he maintains his faith, in the end all will work out right. That is to say, pride contains within itself its own destruction; faith contains within itself its own vindication. After all the New Testament faith is not a misunderstanding of the Hebrew "faithfulness," for man cannot go on being faithful unless he has faith; he cannot, in face of this world's fickle ways, persevere in righteousness unless he is convinced of two things: first, that righteousness is of value for its own sake, that to be just is something better than merely to succeed, and, second, that in the eternal world, and in the slow translation of its principles in this world, which must be by man's acceptance of them, there is the assurance that



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the things discerned by faith, and faithfully followed, are those which are really permanent and which in the end will prevail. It is the faith of the New Testament which has taught men to see that persecution and oppression matter nothing beside a clear conscience and an upright life. The value of these in themselves outweighs the suffering which the seeking after them frequently entails; and this suffering is never worthless; in the end it will establish the things for which men are willing to suffer. To see this is to live by faith, and it is a faith which enables men to remain steadfastly true. Here then there seems to have come to the prophet what is a new spiritual judgment, that it was better to be defeated with Israel than to triumph with the Chaldeans. The principle is that external things do not measure the significance of life; man must learn first of all to abide by his inner sense of truth and justice, yet as he does this, so truth and justice will come to prevail in the world. It is a paradox, but it is true: care nothing for this world's judgments, and you will eventually establish justice in the earth.

We shall see something more of how this can be worked out when we look at our next prophet;



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but meanwhile we can note how, after receiving this revelation, Habakkuk turns to look upon the scenes of violence once more, and now he has the patience to analyse them calmly, to picture not only their injustice, but their folly and the vengeance that they themselves are sowing. He has a series of woes, or lament songs, each beginning with the word Woe (for chapter ii. 5, "wine is a treacherous dealer," is evidently corrupt and ought to begin like the others : "woe to the treacherous dealer"); and by the word woe is not meant a prediction ; it is more strictly a lament over man's foolish addiction to evil. The prophet sees how the injustice produced by the Chaldeans is bound to raise up those who will inflict the same evil upon them in turn : "because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall spoil thee." He declares that because the great city of Babylon, of which such boast was made, has been enriched by violence, and built with the blood of men, the very stones of the wall shall cry out, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it. These wrongs cannot be hidden, they are like a rot in the society founded on them, and an unrest in the heart of those who plan them. For it is not perhaps stretching the

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prophet's meaning to say that very often the cities which have been built by such cruel measures, often reflect in their very architecture the hardness and cruelty of their builders ; and certainly the city that is built upon injustice soon begins to show itself in those festering sores we call slums. The prophet even believes that the violence done to Lebanon, and the destruction of the wild creatures that dwell therein, shall turn to dismay in the heart of this people: the despoiling of nature's beauty and the cruel slaughter of unoffending creatures does in the end bring desolation to the souls of men. But infinitely more is the " violence done to the land, to the city and to all that dwell therein." It is man's shed blood that stains the soul, that brings distress, and remorse, and fear. The prophet refuses to believe that it is God's purpose that the peoples should spend their strength in erecting these monstrous structures which are only destined for destruction, or that the nations should wear themselves out in tasks that effect no permanent or beneficent purpose. He begins to mock at the dumb idols which such people worship, which help to account for the obtuseness of their judgment and the materialism of their outlook ; he calls to

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the earth to be silent before the invisible God that it may learn of Him the true way, and predicts that at length the peoples shall realise their folly and refuse to waste their worship on that which brings them no spiritual return. So he looks forward to a time when man's mind shall be open to the revelation of God, and "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

With this far-off vision, and with his clear understanding of how it is to be attained (and perhaps the very stupendousness of men's follies and the futility of their vengeance are preparing them for it), we may take leave of our prophet; for the psalm which composes the third chapter is either not his at all, and has been transferred here from some collection of psalms because it was there traditionally ascribed to him, or, if it is his, yet perhaps could better be considered when we come to the apocalyptic element in some of the later prophets. Meanwhile we can turn to consider another attitude towards the heathen menace, that taken up by the prophet Jonah.

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### JONAH

The book of Jonah is unique among the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, not only because of its being in the form of a story, but because of its unusual humanitarian and religious outlook. Unfortunately, the strangeness of the story has very much obscured the moral value, for frankly as a narrative of actual occurrences it would be an incredible story. It is not simply that the prophet is said to have passed three days and three nights in the inside of a great fish, where he was able to compose a beautiful prayer-psalm, and was afterwards cast up none the worse; for defenders of the historicity of the story have accumulated a number of stories where something approximately as marvellous has happened, and moreover it is not for us to shut out the possibilities of miraculous intervention; but the whole story is written apparently without any concern for verisimilitude. The sailors, who were heathen, on getting rid of Jonah at his request, sacrifice and make vows to *his* God. After Jonah had entered only a day's journey into the city, proclaiming its destruction within

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forty days, every single individual in Nineveh is said to have repented, and when the news reached the king he not only put on penitential mourning, but made a proclamation and commanded that a complete fast should be kept by the whole of the inhabitants, that they should cry unto God, and that both the fast and the prayers should be shared in by the beasts. The incidents concerning the gourd, as well as Jonah's peevishness over its withering, are of a trivial character, which seems to indicate that the writer himself is not asking us to look upon the story as historical fact. The whole work is much more after the fashion of a Midrash, or an edifying story, and it is difficult to do anything else than regard the whole story as a fable, and as so intended by the writer. There may have been some tradition that Jonah, the son of Amittai, who is mentioned in 2 Kings xiv. 25 as the prophet who predicted the restoration of Israel's territory, went to Nineveh and there preached repentance; but if anything is certain in history it is that the people of Nineveh never passed through so momentous a moral change as this book depicts. Anyhow, this book could not have been written by that prophet, and does not claim to be; it must have been composed

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long after the exile, perhaps as late as somewhere round the year 300.

The moral purpose of the book is, however, absolutely clear : it is an exhortation to the Jews to undertake the conversion of the heathen. It is not certain whether the prophet's story is meant to be an interpretation of the exile as intended to teach the Jews this very lesson. Some commentators have thought that Jonah is to be taken as symbolical for Israel, for Jonah means dove ; and that word was sometimes applied to the nation, as by Hosea, when he calls Ephraim " a silly dove " ; and there is an extraordinary simile used by Jeremiah which might have prepared for, or suggested, the story of Jonah :

Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon hath devoured me, he hath crushed me, he hath made me an empty vessel, he hath swallowed me up like a dragon, he hath filled his maw with my delicates ; he hath cast me out (Jer. li. 34).

But it is highly doubtful whether we can press this symbolical interpretation. Instead, it seems safer to regard the story purely as a fable, constructed in order to bring home to the Jews their constantly evaded mission. It is frequently predicted by the prophets that the heathen nations shall come to believe in Israel's God and

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in His revelation to His chosen people ; while the second part of Isaiah is dominated by the idea that to act as the missionary to the Gentiles is the true purpose of the obedient " Servant of the Lord." But this purpose was steadfastly resisted, either because of the false interpretation of their history, which enabled the Jews proudly and blindly to assume that God had selected them alone, not only for His revelation, but as the sole objects of His salvation ; or, because they had suffered so much from the nations round about them that their nationalistic hatred would not allow them to consider any such mission. Even if there were any among the Jews who believed that this was their national duty, they might well have doubted whether it would have been of any value to attempt its prosecution. It is sufficiently daring to suggest that Israel ought to have attempted the conversion of Nineveh, but it is almost incredible to suggest that Nineveh would actually have repented. Nevertheless, the book is directly aimed at Israel's pride in her isolated possession of the truth of God, and it perhaps does not so much attempt to show that if the truth had been proclaimed to the heathen they would have accepted it, for no one could seriously

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have expected anything so immediate and universal as the repentance of Nineveh which the story gives us ; but it is rather an endeavour to persuade the chosen people of God's equal and compassionate concern for the heathen. Play is made with Jonah's exaggerated distress and his selfish concern over the withering of the gourd, and then he is rebuked by the argument that if he had reason to feel like this about his own comfort and the destruction of a plant, then how must God feel over the destruction of a city where there were more than six score thousand persons who could not discern between their right hand and their left.

This is an entirely different attitude from that which we have been studying in Nahum. There the moral blindness and perversity of Assyria and the savage policy of Nineveh are made an altogether sufficient reason for its destruction. But here, the very fact, first, of the large number of inhabitants, and, second, of their great moral ignorance, calls out only the pity of God, in which, by a touch almost unparalleled in the Scriptures, the very beasts are included. In this strange story therefore the revelation of the heart of God rises to the supreme height of its attainment in the



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Old Testament, and, in some respects, in the whole Bible. And there it stands as something attained, and therefore as the supreme truth, however other revelation may fail to reach it. Whatever else history may teach, however we may discern the moral law bringing vengeance on those who ignore it, whatever God Himself is compelled to do because of the hardness of man's heart, this is His feeling towards man ; and it is this feeling which he calls all men to understand, to share, and to apply ; for nothing else holds any hope for the world. Vengeance succeeds vengeance not only in a vicious circle, but in growing fury, and, therefore, in growing futility. We strive to wipe out crime with crime, wrong with wrong, and the result is we do nothing but increase not only the evil that is in the world, but the moral corruption of men. In the vain endeavour to avenge the blood that has been spilled, mankind has shed blood in torrents which flows through history in ever widening stream, staining every age with cruelty and suffering, and threatening to drown the world in a still more awful deluge. Somehow we must find a way of breaking this horrid entail and reversing the law of vengeance. That cannot be done

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merely by the adoption of a forgiving and compassionate spirit, although how much this could accomplish has never yet been tried on any great scale, while Christ declares that without a willingness to forgive his fellow, man will not be forgiven by the Father ; but if ever such forgiveness is to become the law of life, it must be supported not only by faith in man's convertibility, but by the actual endeavour to bring it about. There is only one thing to save this world from a progression of violence and the utter destruction of the race through a series of ever worsening world wars, and that is the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ and the conversion of the nations to the faithful following of His teaching. For this, there is needed not only missionary enterprise, such as the Church has at last dared to conceive, which, by its growing volume and its profounder appeal, may be looked upon as already full of promise for the future of mankind, but it must be backed up by a complete change in the spirit of the nations, as well as by heroic adventures in forgiveness carried out on a massive scale. So long as the superiority in which any nation prides itself (and there is no need to deny that some have more light than

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others), is used merely to enforce its culture on other nations, or leads it to regard others as unworthy of being admitted even to share its light, so long will national animosities disturb the peace of the world and perpetually work up to some conflict in which all appeals to reason are definitely shut out and blindness and hate work out a like destruction to both sides. It is clearly seen that nations learn less and less from punitive justice, even when it is deserved, and when the nation that administers it strongly believes that it is carrying out the will of God. There are only two things to be done: one is to try the way of forgiveness, and, the other, to seek the conversion of the whole world to the true faith. But they must come together; the proclamation of the Gospel must be backed up by heroic example, and this example must be based upon faith in the universal love of God and in the belief that this is the reality on which all life must be built, the one power that can secure the world, and the only hope for mankind.

The Book of Jonah is a strange, old-world and forgotten message, expressed in a queer, ancient fashion, but there are few things that the present

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age needs more to consider. Modern criticism has recovered its meaning, but this must not beget arrogance or be motivated by the incredibility of the story; for modern thought is far from adopting its teaching, and its programme is still regarded as impracticable. Its reproach falls not only upon the Jews who, because they refused to hearken to it, have lost their place at least in the immediate purpose of God; it needs to fall on the ears of Christendom, which must either take its own faith seriously and set it before the world as a practical policy, or see its own light fade and its leadership pass away.

## CHAPTER V

### Haggai, Zechariah (I), and Malachi

It will be found interesting to group these three prophets together ; first, because they are typical prophets of the post-exilic period, and second, because of the concentration of their interest upon the ecclesiastical and civil restoration which they did so much to inspire and direct.

In the last group of prophets we were studying, two of them, Nahum and Habakkuk, were distinguished from the previous three, Amos, Hosea and Micah, by their comparative silence about the sins of their own people, this being accounted for by their occupation with the judgment coming on their enemies and by the consideration of their omissions and sins, which overshadowed anything to be found in Judah. Zephaniah, indeed, discerned the sins of his own people, and as their punishment predicted the utter destruction of Jerusalem, though he looked forward to a time of restoration, and therein he

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forms a bridge to the prophet Jeremiah, who however, lies outside the concern of our present series. But he marks the last of this type of prophet, among those we are studying, and although we cannot help noting the complete change of outlook, concern and style in those whom we are now to look at, we need not seek very far to discover what has brought about so profound an alteration in the prophets' message. It is to be traced to nothing less than the Fall of Jerusalem in 586, and the deportation of practically the whole of the inhabitants to exile in Babylon. Jeremiah had predicted that the exile would last for seventy years; this was only a period defined in round numbers, or perhaps even only a symbolic numerical term; for not quite fifty years after the destruction of Jerusalem, when Babylon had come under the rule of Persian kings, over forty thousand of the exiles returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, a descendant of the House of David. This return had been predicted in the most glorious and glowing language by the unknown prophet whose works form the second part of the Book of Isaiah. But the actual experience of the returned exiles proved to be very different from the expectations

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which that prophecy naturally inspired. Therefore the prophets now before us have to face disappointment and to attempt a diminished task. That conditions their message, robs it of lyrical fervour, and accounts for their somewhat prosaic tone and their absorption in practical details. While therefore we can hardly expect anything of the vision and power which characterise their great predecessors, this must not conceal from us the courage and faith of these men who, if they refused to indulge in glowing descriptions of the future, yet did not give way to despair, but set themselves to realise what was still possible in the actual situation that faced them. In one respect they mark a noticeable difference from some of the prophets whom we have already studied : namely, in their estimate of the value of the external expression of religion. As we have seen, it looks as if the earlier prophets would have swept away the whole of ritual, in an endeavour to secure freedom from its constant corruption and its perpetual danger of being taken as a substitute for the religion of daily conduct and the interior worship of the sincere heart.

The prophets now before us set themselves to purify ritual, to lift up before the priesthood

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great ideals of what they could accomplish, and to endow both the civil and the religious institutions of their times with something of the idealism which the earlier prophets had projected into the future. We shall have to discuss whether this was really a mistake, and whether they should not have stood merely for an expression of religious faith that was entirely confined to social conduct and the inner remembrance of God and His requirements. But whatever conclusions we adopt, we must not fail to recognise the patience they brought to what seemed the obvious and immediate task, namely, to exalt the work of restoration as a service to be done for the glory of God, and to endow all its necessary provisions with an ideal purpose. A few words will suffice to set the three prophets here grouped together in their historical surroundings. Although we should gather from the Book of Ezra that there was an immediate attempt to lay the foundation of the Temple, it probably was little more than the setting up of the altar of burnt offering on its original site, with perhaps some attempt to mark off and surround the sacred spot; but it was not until the word of the Lord stirred the prophet Haggai in the



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year 520 that the actual building of the Temple was begun. There had not only been considerable apathy amongst the returned exiles, partially explained by the hardships which must have been endured during the first years, when everything had to be concentrated upon bringing the land once more under cultivation and building houses for the people to live in; but apparently there had also been considerable outside opposition to anything that could be interpreted as a fortifying of the city by rebuilding its walls. Every movement had been used by the hostile Samaritans to arouse the suspicion amongst the Persian authorities that the Jews were attempting to organise a revolt against their rule. Evidently the elevation of Darius to the throne of Persia had seemed to offer a favourable opportunity for the work of the restoration to be taken more seriously in hand, either because Darius himself was favourable to it, or perhaps because his coming to the throne was the signal for such disturbances among all the dependencies of Persia, that the central authorities were less concerned in what was happening at Jerusalem. It was in the second year of Darius, as the prophet is careful to inform us, that moved by divine

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inspiration, Haggai urged the building of the Temple. The first eight chapters of Zechariah are dated in precisely the same period, though this prophet concerns himself more with the establishing of a joint ecclesiastical and civil rule. But under their combined impulse the Temple was actually completed inside the short space of five years ; although the city seems to have been left in a somewhat dilapidated and undefended state. In 458 Ezra persuaded another, though much smaller, number of exiles to return with him to Jerusalem, and under his direction the Book of the Law, generally identified with "The Priestly Code," embodied in the Pentateuch, was edited and published. It is between these two events of the completion of the Temple and the arrival of Ezra that the Book of Malachi is to be placed, and although this makes Malachi more than fifty years later than the others, we include his work in the present grouping because he deals with the same subjects as Haggai and the first eight chapters of Zechariah ; and since he records a considerable failure in the endeavour to purify the reorganised priesthood, he will provide us with some help in the discussion as to whether this was after all a mistaken reformation.

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### HAGGAI

The tiny prophecy of Haggai seems to have been a revelation of God given to him for a solitary purpose : that of securing the re-building of the Temple. He is careful to tell us that it came to him four times within one and the same year. Both these facts mark him off from any other of the Old Testament prophets. His work done, and this solitary concern satisfied, he has nothing more to say ; and yet this is not because he is unaware of world movements and impending judgment. He believes that there is to take place a great shaking, which he describes as a shaking of the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. In the writings of the Hebrew prophets we constantly meet with this expectation of some event which will be accompanied by a great physical catastrophe. Often we have reason to think that this is only symbolical language to indicate profound political disturbances which will shake the very foundations of man's existence ; and in the present instance, at any rate, Haggai goes on to explain that there is to be a shaking of the nations in which there will be an overthrow of kingdoms and the destruction of their military

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power; although in the exact form in which he makes his prediction it looks as if he were picturing some movement which first disturbed the natural, physical realm and then manifested itself in the human, political sphere. But we can never be sure that this is literally intended, for Isaiah, speaking of the fall of Babylon, expresses the commotion that would cause under the picture of the fall of the day-star from heaven (Isaiah xiv. 12). And yet in an age which was so full of political disturbances, and in a country like Palestine, where for centuries it could hardly have been known what national stability meant, one is bound to assume that they are always picturing some greater event than that which actually comes to pass in the downfall of nations. But we can return to this subject when we are studying our next group, which is particularly marked by this use of imagery common to apocalyptic writers. Embodied in Haggai's expectation, according to the older versions, there was a prediction that "the desire of all the nations" would come, which was naturally taken to be a prediction of the Messiah. A correct rendering of the Hebrew disposes of this beautiful name for the expected Christ, and we are to read instead :

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“the desirable things of all nations shall come,” which we must take to mean simply that all nations will contribute to the new Temple. Yet the passage must still have some Messianic idea, however dimly conceived, behind it ; for it is unlikely that Haggai simply meant that the nations would come to load the Temple with precious gifts ; or if he did, then it must be as signifying the drawing together of all peoples to acknowledge the worship of the one, true God.

It is with some such expectation in his mind that he urges the building of the Temple. It seems, as we have already seen, that the foundation stone had been laid sixteen years before, and then the work had been given up. Evidently there was a disposition to regard the time as unfortunate ; the people were saying, “It is not the time for the Lord’s house to be built,” and, therefore, he had sought to secure the influence of their leaders, Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest ; while he disposes of the objection that the time had not yet come, by pointing out that the people had already provided themselves with dwelling houses, which were decorated with costly panelling, while the House of the Lord was lying waste. Therefore they cannot object that

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they had no money or strength for this purpose, for men had been looking after their own interests and neglecting any worthy expression of common worship. He declared, in addition, that the disappointing results of the attempt to restore the land to cultivation were due to this neglect : God had not been giving the land its increase, because His worship had been neglected. It appears that this appeal was successfully encouraged by the rulers ; the people began to work upon the Temple in a few weeks from the beginning of Haggai's ministry ; but after some attempts had been made, they were apparently discouraged, for it was obvious that the new Temple could not be built on anything like the lines of the Temple of Solomon. Haggai meets this sense of disappointment by issuing a new message of encouragement. He says : " Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory ? and how do ye see it now ? is it not in your eyes as nothing ? " and goes on to promise in the name of the Lord, that the latter glory of the Temple shall be greater than the former, for, he says : " In this place will I give peace." It seems therefore certain that Haggai had something more in mind than an increased material grandeur,

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even if this was the picture by which he sought to express what he meant. It is not so much the material splendour of the temple that is holding his vision, as the influence that it will have in the world ; for it will be the means of bringing peace to the peoples. We get, therefore, here an echo, however faint, of the great prophecy enshrined both in Isaiah and Micah, in which they refer to the exaltation of the Holy Mount and the turning of the peoples to it, with the blessed consequences of world peace that would follow.

He goes on to discuss a curious question of priestly belief, asking whether, if a priest is bearing in his garment any holy flesh it will sanctify anything else that he touches ; to which the answer is "No" ; and then he asks if anyone has been rendered unclean by touching a dead body, whether that, on the contrary, would make anything he touches unclean, and the answer is "Yes." He then declares that this is the case with the nation at the present time, and it is generally supposed that he is here enunciating a moral law, namely : that uncleanness is of greater contagion than holiness ; and he must be referring to the fact that the people's worship

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had been such a faint, half-hearted affair, that it had failed to permeate their daily life, whereas the secularity and selfishness of their outlook had invaded their worship and brought it down to the level of their ordinary concerns. He promises them that from the moment in which they begin to take more concern for the House of the Lord, their poverty-stricken agriculture will turn to fertility and bring back prosperity. It is quite clear what principle Haggai is striving to enunciate: it is that corporate worship is essential to the prosperity of human society. He may not have conceived quite how this principle worked out, and may have been content to think that God simply rewarded men according to the degree in which He was recognised; and so long as the plea for corporate worship is placed on that level it will have little meaning for the modern mind. But a profounder explanation of this principle may be discerned, and one which makes it easier for us to accept. It is a fact beyond all dispute, although it is one of which few of our modern thinkers seem to be aware, that human happiness and human welfare have in all ages depended considerably upon man's observance of common worship. As far back as



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we can trace, all men have had some form of worship, and this has always taken a corporate expression. Anthropological research has revealed that the endeavour to find expression for this worship has been responsible for the rise, the development, and the continued inspiration of all the arts. It was first of all in his worship that man began to dance; it is perhaps impossible, and mere guesswork, for us to try and explain what there was behind this instinct, but surely we can be at least certain that it was an expression of joy. Evidently man thought that he was imitating something, what he hardly knew; for the instinct must have been almost blind. To the dance, man added in time music, then poetry and the drama. As soon as we get to these stages, we can discern what man interprets this instinct to mean, for now the myths emerge as an explanation of unconscious ritual; and the myths personify the great procession of nature, the movements of the heavenly bodies, the mysterious fertility of the earth, the rise and decay of vegetation. Man feels that unless he imitates these processes they will fail and fertility will cease. It seems a curious idea, but there is probably more behind it than we are able to

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follow ; for ultimately the instinct is capable of a quite rational interpretation : man's recognition of God helps to band the people together, gives them a sense not only of their dependence upon one another, but upon the worth and joy of life. When through higher culture men began to seek a more regular and dignified expression of worship, they began to build temples. So in turn the other arts, of architecture, sculpture and painting, gave birth to new beauties and began to express what man is feeling through his religious experience : for his religious buildings will often reveal his conception of God.

In the Oriental style of architecture, of which we can find remains in Egypt, Mesopotamia or the Farther East, we recognise something crushing, heavy and tyrannical. In Greek and Roman architecture this feeling is considerably lightened by a new sense of beauty and the perfect proportions of the whole. It is now clear that man is conceiving God as much more human. And this impression is confirmed in Greek sculpture, which is a thorough humanising of the idea of God, and although disfigured by the confusion of polytheism and the unworthy conceptions of divine action, which fail to rise above, or even

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attain to, human morality, we can see that man has broken away from the idea that God is a merely natural force and that He is more like man than anything else. It is when we come to the Gothic cathedral, and to the rise of the symbolic painting of the Middle Ages, that we see how infinitely more complicated man's idea of God has become ; and yet how it is all reconciled and comprehended in that which painting now glories in depicting, the face and career of God made Man. All these lovely and significant things, which so immensely increase the joy of life, and enable men to express what often escapes the limitations of word and the struggling aspirations of thought, are directly traceable to the practice of common worship. It is also an historic fact, of which our own age is a sufficient exposition, that the decay of common worship means the decay of the arts. This, in the eyes of many people, would be a minor catastrophe, because they regard the whole of the artistic side of life as only a form of higher play ; but perhaps they may soon wake up to the fact that it means the invasion of life by ugliness, which at length becomes so careless of the beauties of nature and the balance of virtue, that, by the

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combined effect of industrialism and immorality, the soul of man is imprisoned and degraded. But it is almost certain that there are more important consequences than these : it has never yet been discovered where we get our social consciousness from ; it is certainly not due to rational arguments ; man's first attempt at reasoning on these matters has generally ended in the doctrine of "every man for himself" ; indeed, it has even been worked out into the economic maxim that if only selfishness operates to make everyone work hard it will somehow operate for the benefit of the whole community. It is only slowly that this theory is being discredited by its practical results ; and even though we are now being compelled to recognise that it is the ideal of co-operative social life which is backed up by economic law, which if sinned against will exact terrible vengeance, yet it is clear that the original instinct of social dependence must be due to some more primitive feeling that men are members one of another ; and we can trace that back to nothing in history save to the habit of corporate worship.

Similarly, the very sense of God which has sought an expression through common rites must

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in turn be largely dependent upon their observance. Yet we are met by the objection that the acute social consciousness of our times is developing alongside a conspicuous decline in the habit of common worship ; and this decline is supported by appealing to spiritual conceptions of God which, it is said, demand no such expression and are not inspired by them. It is a matter which cannot be judged fully until we have seen the effect of a complete cessation of common worship, and that spread over two or three generations. But it is certainly already possible to ask whether certain deleterious results are not even now becoming visible. It is true we have an acute social consciousness, but it has emerged rather because things are working out so badly than as marking the rise of a quite new instinct. We are now only awaking to the fact that the economic machine we have constructed is directly opposed to brotherhood, and is destructive of fellowship ; but some of the principles that drive that machine would have been held to be utterly immoral even in the Middle Ages ; for instance : to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest ; to make the only standard of exchange what you can get for a thing ; to corner necessities until man's

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need will pay any price ; as well as the whole principle of usury. Moreover, while we are at last becoming aware of the drift of things and are being brought face to face with a choice between continued belief in Christianity and allowing the present economic system to persist, it is extraordinary how little we are able to agree upon what sort of change we should make, the principles which should govern it, or the simplest steps towards its realisation. And the people who want the change are divided into hostile factions and bitter war amongst themselves ; the very motive by which the desire for change is impelled is more often that of hatred of the more fortunate classes than the desire to realise the brotherhood of all. Here surely we may see one of the fatal effects of the cessation of common worship. It is not only that so few now gather together for worship, but it is that we worship in isolation, in sectarian hostility, and very largely according to our social standing and our cultural tastes. Therefore it would seem as if the corporate worship of God was of profound importance for the happiness of human life and the prosperity of society. It is this principle that Haggai has thus early perceived, though perhaps only in

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instinctive form, so that we should not be surprised that the reasons which he gives may no longer be adequate, at least to give intellectual support to the principle. But we can content ourselves for the present with the general idea that man must not allow the worship of God to be neglected ; for if we all dwell in our own houses and provide no place where all men can be equally at home because it is their Father's house, then we shall be sowing the seeds of which the harvest will be decay, anarchy and misery. We can defer a further examination of this principle until we come to the prophet Malachi. Meantime we may notice that Haggai is intensely concerned about securing sympathy and support from the leaders and rulers of the people, and this carries us over by a natural transition to the main concern of the prophet Zechariah.

### ZECHARIAH (i-viii)

It is generally agreed by critics that only the first eight chapters of the Book of Zechariah can possibly be the work of the prophet who, according to the inscription, is contemporary with Haggai.

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He seems to have been of priestly family, as he was the son of Iddo, who is mentioned in the Book of Nehemiah as among the priests who returned to Jerusalem. Zechariah falls naturally into our present grouping of prophetic concern because of his interest in the restoration of the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of his people, in which Haggai himself has already shown some interest by his desire to secure the support of Zerubbabel and Joshua. Indeed, his book closes with words concerning Zerubbabel, which seem to hint at some possibility of his fulfilling a Messianic rôle, and this idea is carried further by Zechariah. But before we turn to consider his ideas on this subject, we had perhaps better notice first the other elements in his prophecy; they embrace two distinct notes: (1) his use of visions, and (2) the development of subsidiary theological ideas which he registers. In his visions he anticipates the apocalyptic style of prophecy: he sees in turn four horses, four horns, four smiths, a man with a measuring line, a golden candlestick, a woman in a meal measure, and four chariots. The use of these visions presents a psychological problem; they seem to be perceived as actual objects of vision and are thus described, and



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only then is their meaning disclosed. It is difficult to understand why the meaning should not have come directly to the prophet's mind without the intervention of a vision which itself needs to be interpreted. It has been suggested that the visions of Zechariah present somewhat the appearance of having been deliberately worked up, for he seems to have had the ideas first and yet preferred to express them through these symbolic images. The earlier prophetic habit of discerning truth in this way may later have become an imitative literary device, as the accustomed and most impressive way of recording divine inspiration; but seeing that the other method is so common to mystic experience all down the ages, we have to conclude that there is a type of mind which works in this way, or that divine truth can often be better imparted by this method. It would seem as if the purpose of God, spiritually communicated to the prophet, is translated by his imagination into these symbolic figures, and only then is its application to actual affairs comprehended. This process evidently belongs to the type of mind which thinks first of all in pictures, as it is said creative minds often do; and especially when the subject

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is of great but obscure movements in the mind of man, or of happenings which lie far in the future, we can understand why a symbol is the sole vehicle not only of reception, but also of the expression of the message.

In the vision of the four horses one is tempted to see a resemblance to the four horses of the Book of Revelation, but there they are distinctly the personification of famine, pestilence, sword and death ; whereas here they seem to be really patrols who report to the Lord that "all the earth sitteth still and is at rest." This is a very different vision of political conditions from that which Haggai had. This prophet sees no indication of those tremendous disturbances which would indicate the break-up of the hostile nations, and therefore the establishment of Judah's freedom. Again, the four horns represent the forces that are scattering Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem, and one is tempted to think of the four powers who successively plagued Judah, such as Syria, Assyria, Babylon and Persia, and of the four smiths as the nations which in turn overthrew them. Then there are four chariots with their horses, who are identified with the four winds or spirits of heaven, and these are evidently

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instruments of punishment, for the winds whenever they go forward to the north have satisfied the vengeance of God. But it is probably something much more general than this to which the four-fold character of these visions refers, namely, the four quarters of the globe; simply representing after a vague fashion that God is controlling the great movements of mankind as they play upon Judah's destiny. The vision of the woman hid in the ephah measure is a personification of Wickedness who is carried away and deposited in the land of Shinar (that is, Babylonia). This is a curious way of indicating that the next trial is not to be a scattering of the people, but some experience which will take the evil out of their midst and deposit it in the heathen world, where it alone has any right to be.

It would seem, however, that some of the visions have been suggested by things actually seen; for instance, the man with the measuring line must have been a familiar object in the restoration of the city; while the seven-branched candlestick, all of gold, is part of the furniture of the Temple. In the flying roll we might discern a prediction of the publication of the Law, seeing that it sets forth a curse on those who break the commandments

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against stealing and bearing false witness; for the work of codifying the Law must have been in preparation for some time before Ezra published it in the year 444 B.C. But the visions of the man with the measuring line and the seven-branched candlestick coalesce in an obscure but attractive ideal of the future of Jerusalem. At this time it was probably still without its containing wall and fortifications, but the vision of the man with the measuring rod suggests that it need not have these defensive protections; firstly, because the city would be too great to be contained within its old site, and, secondly, because the Lord Himself will be her protection, as it were "a wall of fire round about," and the "glory in the midst of her." Then the golden candlestick is set forth to signify that the energy by which Zerubbabel will be able to carry out his task in restoring the city is not by armies nor by power, but "by My spirit"; for the seven lamps represent the activity of God's Spirit, as it were the seven eyes with which He looks out upon the world. The idea is vague and turgid, but it seems to suggest that Jerusalem shall be possessed of such holiness and spiritual wisdom that this shall be her protection against all evil. The writer of the Book

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of Revelation certainly seems to have borrowed from this prophet in his vision of the seven-branched candlestick, and of the seven spirits of God, as well as in his idea that the heavenly city, although walled, has its gates open night and day. We may well see the fulfilment of this prophet's idea of the Jerusalem of the future in the conception of the Church of God, which works not by temporal power, but by spiritual persuasion, and, by giving the light of truth to all the nations, provides them with the only defence that they need. We are not suggesting that Zechariah had such a fulfilment in mind, but that it seems only in the Church of Christ that we can have any practical fulfilment of his vision. Thus it is a momentous advance if Zechariah describes, however dimly, that the only defence of a nation is in its setting forth of the glory of God, and the only protection of the people is an institution of purely spiritual powers which shall persuade, instruct and guide mankind.

The most interesting of Zechariah's visions is the one concerning Joshua, the high priest. He sees Joshua "standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at His right hand to be His adversary." This is probably the earliest

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appearance in Old Testament literature of this spiritual being called "the Satan" or the Opposer. Later on, for instance, in the First Book of Chronicles, the word Satan is without the article, and has therefore become the proper name with which we are so familiar. The evolution of this most significant figure can be traced as undergoing development in the post-exilic Scriptures, and it represents an endeavour, perhaps suggested by Persian thought, to secure, by means of a dualism, the complete separation of God from being the cause of evil or the instrument of temptation. In the Book of Job the Satan is the accuser of man, who is always suggesting unworthy motives, but even there is still included among the sons of God ; while in this vision a further stage of opposition seems to be marked by his being rebuked by the Lord. It registers part of the same development of thought that we should meet in this book with the use of angels as intermediary spiritual beings who converse with man and act as God's messengers to him. This is also due to the feeling that God must be separated more markedly from His creation and from man. But while these angels simply carry out the commands of God, Satan is a figure gradually

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setting himself in opposition, until at length, in the New Testament, he becomes the very fount of evil and the source of temptation ; a being of enormous and always malicious power.

It naturally occurs to us to question how much reality lies behind these figures and whether we are to regard this developing thought as marking a veritable revelation of the existence of a race of spiritual beings intermediate between man and God, some of whom are good and others who are evil. As we watch the development of the thought we can see what demand is made for it in the mind of man ; it only carries a stage further the intensely personifying instinct of the Hebrew mind, yet this creates a certain difficulty for us moderns. If we are to deny a personal spiritual embodiment of the evil principle as a mistaken necessity, why should we not deny it to goodness itself ? It might be a sufficiently philosophical answer to say, that since goodness is the supreme thing, it must be embodied in a person, for otherwise its values have no ultimate meaning and eternal anchorage ; whereas evil, being a negation of good, does not demand any such personal embodiment. The whole subject is full of difficulty. Our prophet has also been



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personifying the destinies of nations and the happenings which overtake them, and it is obviously a process that can end in a bewildering animism and evolve endless and confusing myths. Therefore, we are hardly able to decide from this prophet in what way this process of personification is to be limited; on the other hand, we cannot dismiss the possibility of veritable revelation simply because these ideas have grown in the mind of man in obedience to the felt necessities of thought; for that may be eternally real of whose existence man only becomes progressively aware; while it is impossible to overlook the fact that the New Testament, particularly the mind of our Lord, has taken over the idea of Satan as the personal head of the kingdom of evil as well as the idea of the angels; though the other personifications apparently vanish, since we need not assume the figures in the Book of Revelation to be anything more than symbolic.

It would be foolish for us to rule out the idea that there are intermediate beings between man and God; as it would only be analogous to the animal creation intermediate between man and nature, and it would be unwarrantable to



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deny that there could be evil as well as good spirits. But the whole matter is of only secondary theological importance and must be kept so, especially if tendencies ever manifest themselves to regard angelic beings as creatures to be worshipped, or as the only means of God's communication with man (tendencies which the New Testament expressly forbids); or, on the other hand, if the adversary Satan should be used to excuse ourselves when we fall into temptation, or be blamed for evil suggestions that are due solely to our own corruption; as well as if evil spirits become once again a terror to the mind, as they had been in classical times, to which Christianity, with its simpler theology of direct communication with God and the complete triumph of Christ over all evil, brought such an intense relief.

There is a matter of much greater practical importance in this vision. It obviously signifies the purification of the priesthood and its re-consecration. It is interesting to note that Zechariah conceives the priesthood, with its head, and the civil power, with its ruler, as necessary to the peace of Jerusalem and the stability of the whole social order. It seems quite certain that

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the two olive trees from which the golden lamp-stand is filled, are meant for Joshua and Zerubbabel ; they are called the “ sons of oil ” because they have both been anointed for their task. Again, it is proposed by some scholars that the text of chapter vi. 11 must be altered so as to make it read that a crown is to be set upon the head of Zerubbabel as well as on the head of Joshua ; while in vi. 13 we should read “ there shall be a priest upon his throne.” Then the concluding words, “ a counsel of peace shall be between them both,” lead us to infer that Zechariah strongly believed in the necessity of the State having two heads, a civil and an ecclesiastical ruler, and that if there were peace between these then the glory of God would be set forth and the prosperity of the people be secured. We cannot help being reminded of the mediæval idea so ably expounded by Dante in his *De Monarchia* of the twin powers of the Church and the State, both directly derived from God, and both to work peacefully together for the government of mankind. This fruitful idea is one that still needs consideration even after the experiments and failures that have been made by civilised society. The subordination of the State or the Church, either to the other, has

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worked out badly, but it is often exceedingly difficult to delimit their frontiers and so keep them working peacefully side by side. It is therefore of further interest to note that Zechariah seems beyond question to identify Zerubbabel, either in his person or in his office, with the Messiah, whom he calls "My servant, the Branch." That would seem to indicate that the Messianic task is to be specially concerned with the problem and task of the State ; and we cannot help noting that while our Lord is called a priest by the writer to the Hebrews, He Himself was not of the priesthood and did not claim it, whereas He did claim to be a king.

In the Book of Revelation, which obviously owes considerable inspiration to this prophet, the Temple has disappeared and the city is all in all ; and yet this surely does not mean that God's worship as such ceases, and is only expressed immanently in civic and social duty, for the book goes on to state that "the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof," while the redeemed are called both priests and kings. It may be that we have to look forward to a unification of these ideas and offices ; that the city must become a Church and the Church

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a State ; for it is difficult to see how otherwise there will ever be both freedom and security, both stability and perpetual inspiration.

These speculations carry us beyond the point reached by our prophet's thought ; but the idea at which he stops is one that needs constant consideration, namely that of seeking to exalt both the office of government (whether ecclesiastical or civil), and the persons who fill it. Whether he actually means to identify Zerubbabel with the Messiah or not, it is clear that he wishes him to fulfil, in some measure, the Messianic ideal, and this brings up one of the great questions which modern democracy has to face : whether it can exalt and redeem government to be a true instrument of human development, by regarding it as divinely anointed for the purpose, or whether it is to be content to regard any person in whom government is summed up as the mere representative of the peoples' wishes. It seems obvious that there must be some mingling or some fusion between the two ideas of autocratic and democratic government. To invest any person with arbitrary rights over all others is obviously a complete contradiction of the rights of personality as such. Yet democracy carried

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to its logical issue can be quite as destructive of personality, though this time in the leaders; the purely representative leader or governor, who has simply to voice and embody the desires of those who elect him, has not only an impossible, but a dehumanising task; he would have to become the least personal of all the persons forming the State. It seems rather that we must try to gather into one the extremes into which these different forms of government have worked out: all who govern (whether in State or Church) must be chosen by the people, but they should surely also offer themselves for election in the conviction that they feel called of God, and continue to seek His anointing for the discharge of their office. Without a sense that he is responsible primarily to God, the modern democratic ruler becomes a mere cipher and registration of other people's thoughts, a nebulous composition of the claims of opposing parties, or, still worse, a mere trickster, seeking to retain office by perpetual compromise, or by playing off one party against another, and thus involving the very idea of government in danger or ridicule. The same principles must govern any idea of priesthood; however democratic religion becomes,

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priests of some kind there will always be, and those who deny sacerdotalism most vigorously may find themselves in the end the slaves of popular opinion rather than of divine revelation, or exercising a form of sacerdotalism under the claim of being prophets, while in reality they are merely professional hypnotists. The people must choose their priest, but the priest must seek his anointing from above, and believe that he is responsible ultimately to the revelation of God.

Such are the ideals which seem moving in the mind of our prophet: he believes if they can be secured by the sanctification of rulership, both civil and ecclesiastical, then there will be great joy and peace for Jerusalem.

Zechariah has glowing visions of the city's future; Jerusalem is to be called "the City of Truth" and the "Holy Mountain." It shall have room in it for the old men and women, while the city shall be "full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (viii. 5). This picture is of a time when society shall bring equal security for old age and childhood, and for those who specially need protection and support; men and women shall live out their days in peace; childhood shall

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be a time of freedom and happiness. This city will need no walls for defence ; God Himself will dwell in its midst ; worship shall be at the centre, sanctifying all life, and the presence of God shall be so real that it will be spiritually accessible to all, and a positive defence against evil both within and without. These are ideals that man has long striven after, and now that centuries have passed and they still seem so far away, it would not be surprising if men began to doubt the realisability of such a vision and to fall back upon alternative ideals : a State whose security depends entirely upon its riches and its arms, where the doctrine of coercion as the only means of keeping men in order has at length worked out to the destruction of freedom ; such a State would not only be regimented and reduced to a horrible mechanism, but in the end there would be no place for the old, who are useless either for production or defence, and it would soon come to a suicidal end, for no children would be found in it either. And so we must still labour to secure the realisation of this vision, for without it the people will certainly perish.

Zechariah has no new social teaching to urge ; he is content to fall back upon the message of the

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former prophets which, as history has already shown, can be rejected only with disaster. He attempts a summary of their social message as follows: "Execute true judgment, show mercy and compassion every man to his brother: oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart" (vii. 9, 10).

Here we are obviously preparing for the summing up of the prophetic message in a codified law, which is precisely the work to which Ezra set himself.

We can now turn to Malachi, whose message will probably help us to discover how best these things can be secured.

### MALACHI

Both the personality of this prophet and the date of his prophecy must remain in obscurity; it is not even certain that Malachi is a proper name, for the Hebrew word can mean simply "my messenger." The date of this prophecy cannot be fixed more accurately than by saying that the writer is a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah, and therefore it probably falls



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somewhere between 458 and 432; and perhaps just before the date of Ezra's publication of the Law in 444 would be the best date, in which case the efforts of Haggai and Zechariah to purify and restore the civil and religious institutions of their people would have had very nearly a century's experiment. It must be confessed that the results are not very encouraging. Nothing much is said about the civil government; from the way in which the governor is referred to, it looks as if it was no longer in any sense native, but imposed from the Persian headquarters; but the priesthood has evidently not been purified, as the vision of Joshua had given hope that it might be. Our prophet's concern is almost wholly with the priesthood, and consists of a dialogue in which God complains of the impurity and insufficiency of the service which is rendered, of which the priesthood itself seems unconscious. The accusation is that polluted bread is offered on the altar; the blind and the lame and the sick of the flock are presented for sacrifice to God, where people would never dream of making such an offering to the governor. Further, the tithes seem to have been withheld; and to all this disobedience Malachi traces the lack of prosperity. The

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complaint made against the condition of society is of the prevalence of treachery, which manifests itself chiefly in the growing habit of divorce; men were putting away their wives as soon as they grew tired of them, and, what no doubt made the offence worse in the eyes of the prophet, the remarriages were generally to the daughters of pagans; for by this practice the Jewish religion was being exposed to the heathen corruptions which had been such a perpetual menace in pre-exilic times. Malachi's remedy for all this is the purification of the priesthood and of the ritual; thus, he still believes that external religious observances can be guarded against the corruption which has once again overtaken them.

Malachi has definite proposals of reform: he wants the original covenant with Levi restored, and insists not only upon the personal religion of the priest, but upon his proper education, as well as upon a clearer understanding of his duty to stand for social righteousness and international peace. In addition, he seems to be feeling after some simplification of the ritual; this comes out in a somewhat obscure, much discussed, but highly suggestive passage: the Lord declares by His servant that He has no

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pleasure in the present ritual, and would rather the doors of the Temple were shut and the fires on the altar die, for, "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name is great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense is offered unto My name, and a pure offering: for My name is great among the Gentiles" (i. 11). This can only mean either that the prophet believes God is already being worshipped by the Gentiles with a pure offering and with reverence for His name, or that He is looking forward to some such condition in the future. It is possible that Malachi may have heard of the purer conception and more spiritual worship of such a religion as Zoroastrianism, but it is difficult to think that he could really have believed that at this time the heathen nations were really in advance of his own countrymen in their worship and knowledge of God.<sup>1</sup> It is true that to translate this text in the future tense is unsupported by the Hebrew, but it may be that the prophet sees as a present vision what will only have a future fulfilment. This alone seems to do justice to the picture of this pure worship being

<sup>1</sup> Some scholars would refer this statement to the Jews of the Dispersion, who were remaining more faithful than the Jews of Jerusalem.

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offered in every place from the rising to the setting of the sun. Indeed, even now the prophecy remains unfulfilled, and the question must therefore be faced, what kind of fulfilment of this prophecy is to be expected? By Catholics it has been taken to be the prediction of the Eucharistic offering; the Hebrew word here used is *minḥah*, which is specifically a meal offering, but the word can be used for any offering, and there is nothing in the context which leads us to assume that the prophet looked forward to a time when animal sacrifices would be abolished; indeed, the phrase "incense and a pure oblation" may be translated as "a pure offering is burnt," when it would refer definitely to the sacrifice consumed on the altar, therefore an offering of flesh.

But in studying all these prophetic visions we must have regard not to what is actually predicted, but what may be regarded as a real and worthy fulfilment of the vision, allowing for a true spiritual development. Therefore the question is raised whether a purely non-ritual worship, or something like "the unbloody sacrifice" of the Eucharist, best fulfils the inner meaning of the prophet's vision. If in Christianity

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there is to be no external offering whatever as an expression of the inward oblation of the heart, then we must be willing to carry this process of internalism much farther. It is quite obvious, for instance, that the offering of thanksgiving, the fruit of the lips, is not only symbolic, but may itself become just as substitutionary and dangerous as any external sacrifice; or if we take the Psalmist's words: "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, then said I, Lo, I come; I delight to do Thy will," to mean that the only sacrifice that God requires is the mystical offering of the will, even this may become a substitute for the offering of the whole life in service. It is sometimes claimed that our Lord nevertheless looked forward to such worship when He declared that God was spirit, and therefore must be worshipped in spirit and truth. But if this interpretation of His meaning were to be pressed, it would involve that since God is pure spirit, only pure spirit can worship Him, and then we should have to admit any service done to humanity, being a material thing, is not the service that God requires, and even the worship of pure thought, which has a physical instrument and employs sensuous symbols, would also be excluded. So long as we are in the

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flesh, express ourselves through external acts, and are bound together in a corporate society, there must be some external expression of worship; but this should always link together the inward offering of the whole self to God, the outward expression of that offering, and the carrying out of that offering in the spirit in which all the duties of life are discharged.

It is difficult to see what save the offering of the Eucharist sufficiently satisfies and inspires this demand; it is an offering of the self in union with the perfect oblation of Jesus Christ upon the cross, expressed in the offering of bread and wine, regarded, in whatever way, as His Body and Blood. It is true that the Eucharistic rite has often degenerated into something mechanical and even magical, and especially has been left unrelated to the consecration of Nature's production and man's labour as they are united to satisfy the common necessities of our physical frame, which the Eucharistic offering so obviously sets forth; but this is no reason why a more profound spiritual interpretation, equally aware of the psychological necessity of a definite mystical act and of an external expression which registers a resolution to sanctify the whole of our

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social life as an offering to God, should not come to be the universal understanding of the Eucharistic offering ; at least nothing else seems able adequately to fulfil the vision of the prophet. An external worship there must be ; we must see therefore that a form of worship is secured which corresponds to the internal disposition and which inspires a further social expression. The Eucharistic offering can never be confused with any sacrifice save that which is alone worthy to be offered to God, since it is directly connected with Christ's offering of Himself, while it still makes use of the common elements of our human necessities ; and this is surely just what the prophetic teaching, taken in its wholeness, demands. The later prophets thus correct the puritanical outlook and iconoclastic reforms evidently intended by the earlier prophets ; and there can be little doubt that, when the whole problem is thought through, their combined message alone gives us the full interpretation of the divine will.

But such external worship involves some form of priesthood. How is that to be saved from the deterioration which has nearly always overtaken it ? The prophet looked to the Messiah to purify

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the sons of Levi, and thus reform the priesthood. Jesus did not outwardly attempt any such task, but the fact that He did not say a single word against the institution of the priesthood, or indeed against the sacrificial system, while He did command His apostles to perpetuate the institution of the Lord's Supper, does enable us to believe that He was laying down principles alike for a sanctified offering and a purified priesthood. The New Testament declarations that the whole Christian people is a priesthood is to be set alongside the apostolic practice of appointing a special ministry ; and surely this constitutes that ministry at least a representative priesthood ; and if only that priesthood were democratically elected and its representative character were understood, it would seem that here we have a sufficient basis for a continuation of the institution of the priesthood, yet free from its dangers. But the prophet also, in his reference to the original Covenant made with Levi, laid down another principle which would always prevent the priesthood from deterioration, namely : that " the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at His mouth " (ii. 7). It is in the fusion of a sacrificing priesthood and



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a teaching ministry that we can look for something that will not only correspond to the prophet's vision, but effectually embody the Christian ideal. A solely teaching ministry is equally likely to degenerate and become formal ; it is under the temptation of neglecting devotion and of failing to recognise its representative character and so becoming as despotic and substitutionary as any priesthood can ever be. There are many signs that what is only a teaching ministry loses the power which it so often claims to possess, namely that of prophetic utterance, while the whole business of witnessing for Christ as well as the practice of private devotion is left to this official ministry by the general body of the Christian laity. On the other hand a merely sacrificing priesthood can easily become, as history has sufficiently shown, superstitious and utterly permeated by the caste spirit. The only cure is to bring into one a scholarly priesthood and a devout ministry, and both as representative of the priestly office and the personal witness which devolves upon the whole Christian people ; this seems to be the only true fulfilment and the full demand of the prophetic teaching.

Our prophet tries to meet the objection which

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was urged in his day that worship had failed to secure the favour of God : “ It is vain to serve God : and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts ? ” (iii. 14). In modern form the same charge is continually made even by thoughtful people who abandon the worship of God because they say it does not do them any good, it makes no difference ; but if only it could be understood that worship is primarily not to *get* something from God, but to *give* something to Him, to make completer offering of ourselves, then an attitude might be attained which would enable us to “ return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not ” (iii. 18) ; for the favour of God is not to be determined by external prosperity, at least as that works out in individual discrimination, but in the inward assurance that one has done the right thing and has thereby served not only God, but one’s own generation.

But what is to be done when, with the external observances of worship made as spiritual as possible, and with all the constant reminders of what that worship is meant to signify, we are faced on the one hand with dead and mechanical

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observances, and on the other with the growing abstention of the mass of the people from all worship whatsoever? Here again the prophet has something to say to our own times: "Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another: and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make even a peculiar treasure" (iii. 16, 17). The remedy always for the sad state into which the Church frequently tends to fall is, neither to separate ourselves and make a new Church of the more spiritually disposed, nor to abandon external worship and ecclesiastical institutions altogether, but for those who are concerned for the purity of worship and the exaltation of the spiritual life to band themselves together for spiritual conference, prayer, and meditation, and thus to take upon themselves the responsibility for keeping alive the true fire of the altar, and inspiring common worship by their more intense spiritual desire. This must not be done in any superior or separatist spirit, but as those who humbly feel responsible for thus contributing to the perpetual restoration of the

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Church. For the establishing of these ideal conditions Malachi looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. His vision of this forms one of the most remarkable of all the Messianic predictions: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he shall prepare My way before Me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in, behold, he cometh, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?" (iii. 1, 2). It is not clear whether the prophet is here speaking of two appearances: a messenger who shall prepare the way for God's coming in person, and if so, whether he identifies this preliminary messenger with Elijah; the words, "the Lord, whom ye seek," and "the messenger of the covenant" are joined together, as the Revised Version in the margin suggests, by its alternative rendering, "even," when the one phrase becomes an exposition of the other; it is the Lord, and yet he is the angel of the covenant, that is one who is representative of the Lord, so that here the prophet unites the older idea that God Himself will appear on earth, and the newer conception, guided by the more developed

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theology of the times, that it will be a person who shall be the manifestation of the divine glory. It is very difficult to see how anyone can be both, unless we are willing to look at the amazing fulfilment found in Jesus Christ, who is both God's messenger, the "anointed of the Lord" and is Himself truly God. It is not suggested that this is what the prophet foresaw, but it is suggested that there is no other fulfilment of his vision. Elsewhere he speaks of the sun of righteousness rising upon the faithful with healing in his wings, and this beautiful image has often been referred to the coming of Christ, who will be the light of the world, bringing healing to the nations ; but there is no need to suppose that in these words the prophet was actually referring to the Messianic hope, so much as to the rising upon the world of a new ideal of joyous righteousness, bringing life and health to all mankind ; though once again we may regard Christ, who preached the Kingdom of God and its righteousness as the only solution for earth's ills, and yet offered Himself as the personal head of that kingdom, as the only adequate fulfilment of what the prophet sees to be necessary. But we cannot help noticing all along that the prophet regards this Messianic

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reign as a coming to judgment, for "the day of his coming" he calls "the great and terrible day of the Lord"; and it is for this reason that it is to be announced by the return of the fiery prophet Elijah. Now, although John the Baptist was by our Lord Himself declared to be the fulfilment of this promise, and the Baptist's message was an announcement of coming judgment, how are we to regard the fact that Jesus Himself did not act as this purifying power or actually inaugurate a visible judgment upon mankind? First of all we are bound to remember that our Lord did regard Himself as judge, even during His lifetime acting in a capacity that was setting up a process of moral discrimination in the world, and He did proclaim that He would at the last bring that process to a visible consummation. Malachi sees both visions together, one has happened; the other has been postponed; but this postponement is in itself no disproof of the truth of the prophet's vision, for he concludes his work by declaring that Elijah's ministry will have the effect of turning "the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers," and so saving man from the threatened judgment.

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We must continually bear in mind the contingency implied in all prophecies of doom. If man repents in time he may be saved; and our Lord's coming introduced into the world a moral process, which, if faithfully accepted by man, can postpone the coming of judgment, while if hindered and rejected must bring upon all the world some terrible catastrophe. This same contingency can only explain our Lord's often obscure and surely always symbolical reference to His own coming and judgment. If mankind is willing to receive Him, He may come in glory to redeem the world; perpetual rejection will bring Him near in judgment; and if mankind ever proceeds to a rejection of Himself and His teaching, which is beyond repentance, then, in some mighty act, Christ will wind up human history in a final cataclysm, which will nevertheless still be only the fulfilment of His purpose to redeem the world, for He will be still saving the race, for which He died, from entire spiritual destruction. All this remains to be worked out more carefully when we come to consider the apocalyptic style into which Old Testament prophecy finally develops.

## CHAPTER VI

### **Zechariah (II) and Joel**

It is convenient to take these two prophecies together. They almost certainly belong to a late period, perhaps as late as any of the prophetic writings, save for the Books of Jonah and Daniel ; they are alike in the strong apocalyptic element that runs through them both, though in this they link up to and develop elements that we have already noticed in Zephaniah. Which of them comes earlier it is impossible to decide, though Joel seems to breathe more of the spirit with which we are familiar in later Judaism. It will, at any rate, be convenient to take the second half of Zechariah first in order.

#### **ZECHARIAH (ix-xiv)**

It seems as certain as anything can well be that the second half of Zechariah cannot have been written by the prophet of that name who wrote the first half of the Book which we have already



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considered. Whether the second half of the Book is by a single author is however doubtful ; some critics find traces of at least four distinct writers, and some regard the whole section as a collection of an even more fragmentary nature ; while others think of a single writer who has incorporated in his work passages from other and unknown prophets. There is nothing in these chapters which has the same historical reference, or shares a similar concern with the first eight chapters of the Book. Chapters ix and x might indeed be referred to some pre-exilic time : Damascus is mentioned as one of the objects of God's wrath, the overthrow of Tyre and Sidon and the Philistines is predicted ; Assyria and Egypt are regarded as the great enemies of Israel ; while the tribes of the Northern Kingdom are spoken of under the name of Ephraim, and their return from captivity is prophesied. The religious condition of the people is one in which the *Teraphim*, or oracle images, are still being used. But right in the middle of one of these passages comes a reference to the Greeks, and the impending conflict between them and Jerusalem, which is thought to be unlikely before the overthrow of the Persians by Alexander in 333, for not until then

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would the Greeks appear as a military power which might threaten Jewish freedom. The general opinion is, therefore, that the prophecy is deliberately archaistic, throwing itself back into the past in order to speak to a present situation. Chapters xi, xii. 10—xiii, certainly refer to contemporary history, in which the prophet himself took a part; but the events are mentioned so obscurely and symbolically that it is quite impossible to fix upon any period of the later history with which they can be identified. Chapters xii. 1-9, and xiv deal with future conditions, in which all nations are to be gathered together to battle against Jerusalem. On the whole, if these various fragments have not been merely pieced together by a late editor from widely differing prophecies, and we date them all by the contemporary reference of the middle chapters, it is probable that the whole should be placed in the time of the great disturbances which followed after the death of Alexander the Great in 323, when his kingdom was divided amongst his generals and a period of break-up and general disorder ensued. We may therefore consider these three sections in order.

Chapters ix and x, which we take to be

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pre-dated merely as a literary device, contain little material worthy of our study, with the exception of the wonderful verses of chapter ix :

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem : behold, thy king cometh unto thee : he is just, and having salvation ; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off ; and he shall speak peace unto the nations ; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (ix. 9, 10).

These verses have all the lyrical beauty which we associate with the Second Isaiah ; they have been sealed with an immense importance by the deliberate fulfilment of them in the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem. But what immediately strikes us is their total unlikeness to the general spirit of their context. They predict the ending of war and the destruction of armaments ; and yet only a few verses later this all seems to be contradicted in the words : “ I have bent Judah for me, I have filled the bow with Ephraim ” ; while the rest of this section is mainly occupied with lurid descriptions of how the armies of the Lord of hosts shall shed the blood of Israel’s enemies and tread them down in the mire. It certainly looks as if this beautiful

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vision of the coming of the Prince of Peace must have been seen by some other writer than the author of the rest of this section, or we must suppose some entirely supernatural state into which the writer of the whole is suddenly uplifted, far above his natural expectation, his nationalistic outlook, or even his ethical convictions. These two verses seem to proclaim, without any ambiguity, the coming of a king who brings justice and victory, not by coercion or force of arms, but by the lowliness of his character and the gentleness of his rule. The fact that he comes riding upon an ass gives an additional symbolic confirmation ; for this animal is chosen instead of the war horse to indicate the peaceful programme and civil methods which the king will pursue. From the actual wording it is not clear whether we are to take the declaration that " the chariot will be cut off from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem," to indicate the defeat of all arms brought against the Holy Land, or whether it indicates that the policy of the Prince of Peace will be to abandon all defences and the preparation for war. The latter seems more in accordance with the vision as a whole, for his world-wide dominion is attained by his power to

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speak peace unto the nations, which surely means his power to lay down the principles of peace, and the obedience which is given to his word. At any rate Christ Himself deliberately adopted this prophecy as setting forth His own interpretation of His Messianic mission and His proffered programme of peace. It is important to notice that this is a piece of prophecy which Jesus deliberately claimed to fulfil by the symbolic declaration of a triumphal procession, which He Himself arranged and adopted so as to make it perfectly clear to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, not only that He claimed to be the Messianic king, but in what sense He interpreted and intended to press that claim. This is the one prophecy in which Jesus has recognised such a description of His Person and work, that He was willing to do this most unusual thing—arrange a demonstration in order to signalise who He believed Himself to be, and to set forth for ever the principles of His rule. By this means He puts His seal upon the true tendency of prophecy. This is a point which should not be overlooked ; the Old Testament is often blamed for its militaristic outlook and nationalistic ideals, but it should be remembered that it contains passages of a distinctly

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pacifistic and universal outlook, and by the further development of prophecy, through which the Word that had spoken in the prophets offers final identification by Himself becoming flesh, these are crowned with His approval, which marks them as the true line of progress towards a complete understanding of the divine purpose.

The second section, which deals with the shepherds is exceedingly obscure. By shepherds is apparently meant the native rulers of Judah. These are described as shepherds who buy the flock only to slay the sheep and hold themselves not guilty, indeed, who bless the name of God, because He has given them these opportunities to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor of the flock. The continued exposure which the prophets make of the low ethical and hypocritical religion of the ruler and master class has done not a little to undermine the power of those who have perpetually abused their position, whether gained through the privilege of government or the power of wealth, to oppress the people and grow rich out of their miseries. We seem still far distant from the time when the tyranny of riches gained by robbery shall be overthrown and made for ever impossible ; but

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at least it is getting less and less possible for men to thank God that He has given them ability or opportunity to become rich merely by the process of organising and taxing the labour of others. Whatever we may think of the system that flourishes by such methods, however difficult it may appear to visualise, still less establish, an alternative rule, all ethical and religious sanction has now been withdrawn from such a system, and for this, which must at length bring its inevitable downfall, we have to thank not only the principles of Christianity, which are at last beginning to be understood, but the ethical insight and indignant denunciations of Israel's prophets. It seems that the prophet himself was told to take over the protection of the oppressed class, whom he calls "the flock of slaughter, and the most miserable of sheep," who seemed destined to nothing but misery and destruction by their oppressors. He took for the insignia of his office two staves; the one called Beauty, or Grace, and the other called Bands, or Union. How much of this is to be regarded as allegorical, and who are meant by the three shepherds who were cut off in one month we cannot tell; but it looks as if some such offer was accepted, but that his

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tenure was short and his programme rejected ; so that he broke his staves and sought some monetary reward for his services. There was offered to him, obviously in contempt, thirty pieces of silver, which is the amount fixed in the Book of Exodus (xxi. 32) as the compensation of an injured slave. This money he refused to keep, and cast into the treasury (according to the Syriac version, which we must read if we are to find any meaning in the text). Then he is told to take the instruments of a foolish shepherd as the symbolic prediction of a ruler who is going to be raised up, probably as the result of this rejection of the prophet's leadership, who shall be utterly worthless, simply feeding on the flock and leaving it in the hour of danger. This passage seems to be continued in chapter xiii. 7-9, which foretells how at length God will awake the sword against this ruler and so scatter the flock, that there shall be only a remnant left, who will, however, call upon the name of the Lord, and become His true people. But there is even a more mysterious reference in the first part of the thirteenth chapter to something that is likely to happen to every prophet in the future. The writer predicts a time when the prophets



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and the unclean spirit shall pass out of the land, and when anyone who attempts to prophesy will be silenced by his parents ; and if there is such a person as a true prophet, he will become ashamed of his vision ; he will no longer assume the prophet's mantle, but will declare himself " no prophet," but a tiller of the soil, though he will be betrayed by the wounds he bears in his breast or between his hands, which he will have to confess he received in his own home.

It looks as if chapter xii. 10-14 has a further description of the fate of such a prophet : the " spirit of grace and of supplication " comes upon the people, and they shall gaze upon this silenced and wounded prophet and mourn for him, with a mourning like that which took place for Hadad-rimmon, in the valley of Megiddon. What all this means no one can tell ; there is certainly nothing to indicate that the prophet himself passed through such an experience ; it is only a prophecy, and then only a quite hypothetical one. The comparison with the mourning for Hadad-rimmon is no help, for the reference entirely escapes us. The name looks as if it belonged to some heathen deity, and it has been suggested that it refers to some ceremony such as the well-known

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mourning for Tammuz, the pagan ritual bound up with the myth of Adonis. Our interest in these obscure references is of course quickened by the application either made explicitly or brought to mind by the New Testament. Christ applied to Himself the prophecy: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" (xiii. 7). Then St. Matthew's Gospel regards the money given to Judas and his attempt at restoration, as a fulfilment of the prophet's price and his returning it to the treasury. The Book of Revelation uses the prediction: "They shall look unto him whom they have pierced" to describe the repentance of the world when it is confronted with the final revelation of the glory of the Crucified. And we cannot help thinking of the Mystic Stream opened on Calvary as the fulfilment of the prophecy, "In that day there shall be a fountain open to the House of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."

It is an exceedingly difficult question how we are to regard such appeals to the fulfilment of prophecy in the light of modern knowledge. It

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is worth while trying to set out some of the actual difficulties and some of the principles that must be borne in mind if we are to proceed to anything like a satisfactory and comprehensive conclusion. We may regard the New Testament writers as eagerly seizing upon any likeness in language which they found in the Old Testament as the most suitable medium in which to tell their own story, and, therefore, such coincidences have no more value than finding a suitable quotation from Shakespeare to comment upon some contemporary event. But this would be a far too superficial view, and one which not only suggests that the evangelists worked up this worthless evidence, but also has to regard Christ as being under the dominion of a similar delusion. Perhaps, therefore, it would be just as well to notice a solution of the problem as extreme in the other direction : it is that which has been proposed by the mythological school, namely the belief that a great deal, if not the whole, of the Gospel narrative owes its origin to nothing more than the stringing together of such passages from the Old Testament as we have been considering. This is a literary and psychological impossibility. How is it conceivable that anyone could gather

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from the Old Testament passages scattered in various and widely separated sections, many of which have no predictive intention, whose context often precludes the meaning given to them in the Gospel narrative, and whose correct translation would not even suggest the use made of them, and out of such material fashion a coherent and dramatic narrative ? It will not bear a moment's consideration. At the same time it must be admitted that there are instances which support both these efforts at a solution ; only they are few, unimportant and cannot be pressed to cover the whole. Two instances may be looked at more closely : if the passage " I will smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered " referred to some unworthy ruler, and not to the prophet who was seeking to be a true shepherd, however foolish his methods appeared, and however utterly he was rejected, then the application of that passage by our Lord does become nothing more than a happy coincidence of language with a quite opposite application to two entirely different persons. The application of the story of the prophet's hire to the money given to Judas for his betrayal, is still more complicated. The story in St. Matthew tells us that the price was

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the same ; that when Judas saw his Master's fate, he flung the money back into the sanctuary ; and that the chief priests felt that they could not put blood money into the treasury, and so bought with it the potter's field to bury strangers in. Now the correspondence between the two instances is lessened, first of all by the discovery that the words in the Hebrew, " cast it into the potter," seem quite meaningless, and that the Syriac reading, " into the treasury " does make sense and agrees with the words that follow : " in the house of the Lord." Secondly, the prophecy which St. Matthew believes to be fulfilled is referred to Jeremiah, the prophet. This is supposed to be a slip of memory, which may have been brought about by a confusion with the narrative of Jeremiah's purchase of a field and his visit to the potter's house ; but to propose that the story in St. Matthew has been simply invented in order to fulfil the prophecy entails that the Evangelist knew of both editions of the original story : the one in our manuscripts and the one in the Syriac (which is unlikely, though not impossible) ; and, in addition, that Judas's purchase-money was made identical in value with that of the prophet's hire. But unless (I) there was such a coincidence in price,

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or (2) Judas did throw the money down in the sanctuary, or (3) a potter's field was purchased with it, there would be nothing to put the evangelist on to the track of this prediction.

It therefore seems as if we must seek for some deeper principle of prophetic fulfilment, and while we can no longer be bound down to the fulfilment of details, we must find something that explains the general resemblance between the prophetic pictures of the Messiah and their combination in the character and career of Jesus, and one that must make room for some quite striking resemblances. Perhaps the most promising line of thought is that which moves first of all along the general lines of poetic inspiration. Take the prophet before us as an example : he wants to be a true shepherd ; he is rejected ; he broods over the tragedy of this ; he sees how in the future the true prophet will have to keep silence, because of the degradation that falls upon prophecy ; he conceives of him as being violently silenced by his friends even to the point of their wounding him ; and then how the nations' sufferings, through their own follies and under unjust rulers, lead them to see that they have passed the true prophet by, and they mourn the fact that they treated

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him so scandalously. Into this picture are poured not only the prophet's own experiences, but a hundred associations of the general fate that befalls the just man and the true prophet. He thinks of all the vicarious suffering he himself has witnessed, and suddenly it dawns upon him that this may have the effect of awaking the people to repentance, and so by the light of his own experience, he draws a picture to show the operation of these principles, and centres it, as the poet will, round an ideal figure of his imagination. So it comes to pass that when Christ appears, He gathers up into Himself the sufferings of the just for the unjust, and deliberately takes hold of the vicarious principle as the principle by which He will live and by which He believes God will bring men to repentance and so redeem the world. Thus there emerges from Hebrew prophecy, taken on these broad lines, and the Passion of Jesus, this amazing and sometimes striking correspondence, explaining far better than the old prediction and fulfilment system ever could, all the underlying inspiration by which God draws the race towards redemption, and of which the prophets catch here and there so wonderful a glimpse.

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The last section of Zechariah which remains to be considered is that contained in chapters xii (1-9) and xiv. This is an astonishing picture of the gathering of all the nations against Jerusalem. The belief that Jerusalem was to be destroyed by an alien invasion is, as we have seen, frequent in the prophets, but apparently they always have in mind some specific nation, and it is always traced by them as a punishment due to the wickedness of the people. The outlook before us entirely changes; it is no specific nation, but just vaguely "all nations," and there is no indication that the sin of the inhabitants has brought this calamity upon them. The Lord gathers the nations in hostile array against the Holy City, only that He may utterly destroy them. There still remains in Zechariah a certain element of detail when he comes to paint this picture: "the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished: and half of the city shall go forth into captivity" (xiv. 2); and then the Lord shall intervene, the intervention taking place in the form of a theophany, in which the Lord descends and stands on the Mount of Olives; at the touch of His feet the mountain is split in twain, a great valley is disclosed and



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through this the peoples flee ; then “ the Lord my God shall come, and all the holy ones with Thee ” (xiv. 5). The consequences shall be twofold. The peoples who have warred against Jerusalem shall be smitten with a plague and “ their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their sockets, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth ” (xiv. 12) ; fighting shall break out between the allied enemies, and all their gold and silver and apparel shall be left for a spoil. The other consequence is a tremendous change in the configuration of Jerusalem and the land about it : living waters shall flow from the holy mount, both eastward and westward, and the whole land round about shall become depressed so that Jerusalem shall stand up in glorious isolation ; day and night shall vanish and shall give place to one continuous day, which shall know neither heat nor cold, neither brightness nor gloom, but one serene light like that of eventime. Finally the Lord shall be king over all the earth. This vision implies that the true religion shall hold the allegiance of all mankind ; there shall be an end of all heathen nations ; there shall not even be that difference among

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men which gives rise to different names for God ; His character shall be understood by all, therefore He shall be called by one name. Everything in the Holy City shall be sanctified, from the commonest vessel to the sacred utensils of the altar, and the bells upon the horses shall be inscribed " holy unto the Lord " (xiv. 20), equally with the mitre of the high priest. The remnant of the nations that have been spared after the dreadful destruction shall become proselytes and go up year by year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and shall keep the Feast of Tabernacles ; if any refuse or fail there shall come down upon them drought and pestilence. It will be seen that the vision attempts to be universalistic, but this world-wide acknowledgment of Israel's God is only reached through destruction and coercion. The sting of resentment against ancient enemies is still traceable, and the final word " there shall be no more a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts " (xiv. 21) means exclusion rather than conversion as the means of attaining perfect sanctification.

It remains to be considered what can be meant by this vision of final battle between Jerusalem and all the nations of the earth, and by the great

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catastrophes and changes in nature which shall succeed it. We may regard the gathering of the nations to battle as prompted perhaps by the extraordinary hostility which the Jewish nation has so often succeeded in arousing against itself, and of which, in the latter years of Judaism, their prophets were beginning to be conscious; and this has been woven into the premonition that there must one day be a mighty conflict between the forces of evil and goodness, and the forces of revelation and unbelief. That such a critical issue should usher in the consummation of human history is not so unthinkable as under the dominion of more Christian hopes we have sometimes been tempted to suppose. Good might spread through the world by a gradual leavening of true ideals, but in the event of such a process of peaceful penetration failing, then a second method is in the hands of God Himself, to allow evil to fruit itself until the harvest is ripe, to force the issue from crisis to crisis until good and evil stand facing one another in clearest contrast, when evil is finally manifested and overthrown. Through what conceivable historical crises or movements in the mind of man such a prediction can ever be realised we cannot even guess, and that is perhaps

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why the prophets of the later age tend more and more to point to a clash of arms, with some tremendous natural cataclysm, for the painting of their picture. We may prefer to believe that the realisation of their prophecy will be only a great mental combat, a spiritual upheaval, and that at last the light shall shine clear for every mind ; one great purpose shall come to hold the heart of man, and God shall be loved and served by all, our spiritual vision at last being so sharpened that He becomes truly understood and seen as He actually is. But after the recent experience of the Great War, it is evident that we must not shut out the possibility of some critical conflict that may force our race back only through suffering and decimation to find the way to truth and peace ; nor can we, with the wider horizon of immortality, and the prospect that even science foresees as a possible end to the physical universe, altogether disregard the other element in the language of these apocalyptic prophets, where nature is dissolved at the touch of God's hand. The Hebrews were used to seeing the most dreadful storms sweep over their land ; some memory of such catastrophes as the Deluge or the shrinkage of the earth which formed the valley of the

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Jordan, or some quite historic event like the earthquake in the reign of Uzziah, may have left upon them an unusual impression of the terrible forces that lie behind the accustomed order and general serenity of nature; so that they naturally use descriptions borrowed from storms of overwhelming grandeur and terror to picture some great destructive act on the part of God as accompanying the final manifestation of His Being. It would be foolish for us to try and see which of these alternatives is likely to come to pass; speculations upon an Armageddon and a collapse of nature at the calling of the world to judgment, have produced in a certain type of mind a narrow outlook and fevered expectations. But neither, on the other hand, must we allow ourselves to be lulled into a false security, which believes that all things shall continue as they have been from the beginning, whether we have in mind the social and political structure of civilisation, or the stability of earth's visible frame.

It is such a theophany which is described in the majestic poem ascribed to Habakkuk and attached to his book, but which need not now be further noticed, save to remind ourselves of the fact that whatever catastrophe overtakes the natural order,

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the soul which knows the secret of its eternal anchorage in God may rejoice in the Lord and joy in the God of its salvation (Hab. iii. 18).

These considerations make a natural transition to a slight notice of the last of the Minor Prophets we are to consider, namely the Book of Joel.

### JOEL

We know nothing about this prophet save that he is the son of Pethuel, and we can gather nothing more about him from his work. There is no indication of the period in which he prophesied either directly given in the title, or clearly discernible from the character of the book. It has been placed in nearly every period of the prophetic dispensation, but nearly all modern scholars are agreed that it belongs to a late time. The mention of the sons of the Grecians certainly brings it down to a period contemporary with the prophets we have just been studying. The book is obviously dependent upon the earlier prophets; its language throughout being the constant echo of theirs (particularly of Obadiah's, which, therefore, calls for no special examination) while the temper of the book closely reflects the

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growing rigidity of thought and outlook known as Judaism. We can say nothing more definite than that the prophecy was probably written some time in the fourth century; but its immediate cause was a tremendous devastation suffered by an invasion of locusts. This calamity is depicted in vivid language and in details which come obviously from close observation. The pervading poetic element often passes over into hyperbole, and the likeness of this invasion of insects to that of a foreign army has laid such hold of the prophet's imagination that sometimes readers have mistakenly imagined that it is a military invasion he has in mind; but his descriptions of the locusts and the devastation wrought by their settling down upon the land makes an excellent chapter in natural history, and the calamitous effects, according to reliable witnesses, are scarcely overdrawn. This visitation had so terrible an effect that not only was the land completely swept of sustenance for man and beast; the vine, the fruit trees, standing crops and pastures being so wiped out of existence, that what was a garden of delight was left a wilderness of desolation; while there was not even enough left to sustain the meal and drink offerings

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which formed part of the ceremonial worship of the Temple. It is an indication of the importance laid upon these observances that their cessation through the famine caused by the locusts should be regarded as one of the worst effects of the disaster.

Joel does not charge this calamity to the people's sins, but he does call on everyone to make a great act of penitential intercession ; he bids the officials sanctify a fast and proclaim a solemn assembly ; he calls upon the priests and ministers of the Lord to " weep between the porch and the altar," and all the people to gather themselves together, forget every other concern and cry aloud for deliverance. The words in which he encourages this great act of national repentance are well-known by their constant repetition at the penitential season of the Church's year, or on occasions of great disaster :

Turn ye unto Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning : and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God : for He is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repenteth Him of the evil (ii. 12, 13).

It will be noticed that this is not so much a confession of sin, as an act of penitential



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dedication to God. We may detect a certain element of formalism and there is no longer the same depth of ethical reality as in earlier prophetic exhortation. We should now find it difficult to believe that an act of repentance would necessarily bring prosperity in its wake; not because we no longer believe that God can change the course of nature in response to changed behaviour, but because the Christian religion has taught us to be even more independent of reward. Yet the attitude here adopted is often more valuable than that found in the earlier prophets. We cannot always claim that natural catastrophe is due to sin, but we can always say that the meaning of the hardships and calamities which are inherent in the natural system is to make our souls cleave far more closely to God, and to teach us the spiritual valuation and destiny of this life of ours.

The prophet gives us a further display of the apocalyptic style in his description of the sympathetic accompaniments of nature at "the Day of the Lord." He will "shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come"

## Oracles of God

(ii. 30, 31). As we have more than once shown, such language may sometimes be only symbolical of some great political upheaval; but this is hardly likely here, since what such natural catastrophes may symbolise is also set forth when the author goes on to describe the gathering of all the nations to Jerusalem. This is to take place in the valley of Jehoshaphat, concerning which we know nothing more than that it must be one of the valleys round about Jerusalem; but this shall prove for multitudes "the valley of Decision." By a curious reversal of the great prophecy in Micah and Isaiah, the nations are now to beat their plowshares into swords and their pruning-hooks into spears, and yet apparently only so that it can be shewn how futile is their resistance and how self-destructive their methods. For now the great act of judgment is to take place; it is almost certain that the prophet means by that an act of slaughter, for he speaks of the vintage being ripe, the winepresses full and the vats overflowing, evidently with the blood of the slain. This terrible time is succeeded by an era of prosperity, but it is practically confined to Jerusalem; Egypt and Edom shall become a desolate wilderness, for all the violence that they

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have done to the children of Judah and the innocent blood they have shed in their own land. The stranger shall never again set foot in the Holy City, and so it shall be cleansed at last from all defilement. It is clear that whatever these pictures of upheaval and slaughter mean, they set forth a principle of endless retribution, which is by no means to be thrust on one side as inconceivable; though it should be noted that here it deals not with individual souls, but with national existence. However necessary it may be to think of retribution as also acting upon individuals, and whatever difficulties from every point of view that presents when understood as an eternal destiny for any soul that God has created, one thing is clear: that the glory of cities, the might of nations, and the culture of civilisations may be sometimes brought to an end by a moral process that is at work in history, and they then remain for ever as an example of retribution; and no nation must be so foolish as to overlook the possibility of a like judgment falling upon itself.

Embedded in this somewhat narrow and clouded vision, we find one word of prophecy which lifts Joel's little book to a serene height.

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It contains no prophecy of the Messiah, but it looks forward to an event which the New Testament claims as fulfilled at Pentecost, and as therefore lying beyond the earthly mission of the Messiah, but a phenomenon which flowed from His work and is due to His personal sending of the Holy Ghost :

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I shall pour out My spirit upon all flesh ; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions : And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My spirit (ii. 28, 29).

Here is the most hopeful vision that any prophet can have of the future, namely the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon all flesh, giving illumination to the soul of man, a perpetual energy arising in the mind which, through dream and vision, disturbs man from his complacency and contentment and ever urges his spirit on to partake more fully of the Spirit of God. Whether Joel had in mind a universal outpouring of the Spirit extending beyond his own nation or not, his expectation passes beyond all narrowing of spiritual endowment to a few great minds, or even to one sex or class.

It must be our everlasting hope that such an outpouring of the Spirit is a possibility for all to experience, and not to be confined to Pentecost nor even to the permanent indwelling of the Body

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of Christ by the Holy Spirit ; for that Body, by its very constitution, offers to Him an instrument through which He can always work upon the world outside. The history of the Christian Church encourages the hope that if we are faithful to the message which is committed to the prophets and incarnate in our Lord, all mankind shall share in the illumination, the energy and the progress which are generated in the Spirit-bearing Body of the Church. No doubt the Spirit will still work through individuals who are specially prepared and are supremely dedicated, but we know that there is such a thing as the overflowing of the Spirit, generally traceable to their ministry, which may affect an ever vaster mass of common humanity. We are perhaps to-day more concerned with the evil effects of mass suggestion and the unsatisfactory results of great revivals, but on the whole these are not essential to such movements. If a revival has been truly prepared for by real insight into the working of the Spirit; if there is a deep understanding of the mind of God which the Spirit reveals, and if there is already prepared an institution—though it needs to be very much purer and more united than the Church is to-day—

## Oracles of God

which is able to gather the people into fellowship, educate them by a system of spiritual discipline, and offer them all the means of grace, then it might prevent, as has so often happened in the past, a genuine movement of the Spirit of God from being dissipated or perverted, or only leading to futile schisms. For such an outpouring we must perpetually pray and prepare; we are not to be discouraged by anything in contemporary affairs that seems to give more power to the forces of evil, threatens to hinder or diminish faith, or proffers some substitute for the true religion of Christ. These will pass; this hope remains.

Whether through a developing crisis between the forces of good and of evil, through the patient work of a genuine education, or through some great outpouring of the Spirit of God, either here in this world, or even if this world should work out to failure, then in some other, the Kingdom of God shall come; and our hope of this finds its guarantee in the fact that while the kingdom of which these prophets dreamed still tarries, the King they predicted has already come and, soon or late, men shall find in Him their only peace, society its only crown, the nations their only security.

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